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**Building a conservative welfare state in
Botswana**

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Building a conservative welfare state in Botswana

Abstract

Botswana's welfare state is both a parsimonious laggard in comparison with some other middle-income countries in Africa (such as Mauritius and South Africa) and extensive (in comparison with its low-income neighbours to the north and east). Coverage is broad but cash transfers are modest. This reflects distinctively conservative features – including especially preferences for workfare and for minimal benefits paid in kind (food) rather than cash – combined with parsimonious cash transfers for select categories of deserving poor (the elderly and orphans), administered through the Department of Local Government, not a dedicated welfare department. This is a very different model of welfare-state-building – and, more generally, social contract – to those of its neighbours in Southern Africa. It is the result of the specific character of poverty in Botswana, the enduring but not unchallenged political dominance of the conservatively paternalist Botswana Democratic Party, and the predominant values and beliefs in the society.

1. The paradox of welfare policy in Botswana

Welfare states in Africa are distinguished by their emphasis on social assistance – with benefits in cash or kind – rather than social insurance (Seekings, forthcoming), but even within Africa there is variation. Botswana is a case that has been previously assessed in very different ways, as both extensive and parsimonious. In this paper, I argue that both of these characterisations are correct. Botswana is an example of a conservative African welfare state, characterized by a distinctively conservative approach to precisely who is de-commodified, how, to what extent, and with what legitimating ideology.

Botswana is a sparsely-populated, arid country with a small population that grew from about half a million at Independence to 2 million people in 2010, in an area a little larger than France but smaller than Texas. At independence, in 1966, it was one of the poorest countries in the world, with GDP per capita about one half of its

northern neighbour Zambia and one-tenth of its southern neighbor South Africa. The new country had little infrastructure and few public services. Three decades later, in 1997, the government's *Vision 2016* document set the objective of eliminating absolute poverty by 2016, i.e. the fiftieth anniversary of independence (Botswana, 1997b). This objective was not implausible given the country's rapid, mineral-driven economic growth from the early 1970s. Real GDP per capita had grown nine-fold between 1966 and 1997. Its GDP per capita was about to surpass South Africa's, and was almost ten times higher than Zambia's.¹ Poverty had already declined significantly, although most of the benefits of growth had accrued to the rich, resulting in widening inequality in the distribution of income. *Vision 2016* therefore proposed that more should be done for the poor. Botswana should become "a compassionate and caring society, offering support and opportunity to those who are poor, and including *all* people in the benefits of growth" (*ibid*: 8, emphasis in original).

For some scholars, Botswana failed to achieve this goal. In this view, its welfare policies have been distinguished by an enduring failure to include all of its citizens in the benefits of growth. Bar-On (2001) emphasized the parsimony of the country's welfare policies, and concluded that "Botswana's social assistance scheme fails many of the very poor completely, and those who do benefit from it are receiving steadily less of the nation's increasing prosperity" (2001: 264). Ulriksen (2011, 2012) contrasted Botswana with Mauritius. Both were multi-party democracies with open, middle-income economies and competent state institutions. Both invested heavily in public education, as well as public health and housing. Yet in the early 2000s Mauritius spent one-fifth of public expenditure on social insurance and social assistance whereas Botswana spent only between 1 and 3 percent on cash transfers and feeding schemes (Ulriksen, 2012: 1503).² Botswana, in contrast to Mauritius, had no national social security legislation, and benefits were meagre. Whereas public policies in Botswana had focused on economic growth, Ulriksen argued, Mauritius' policies had sought a balance between these and redistributive social programmes. Faced with the global financial crisis from 2008, Botswana had responded parsimoniously whilst Mauritius did so fulsomely. Hickey (2011), who contrasts Botswana with South Africa, is similarly dismissive of Botswana's welfare programmes. They had failed to reach many poor people (notably, the San), were largely non-programmatic and served to protect privilege.

¹ World Bank, World Development Indicators (WDI).

² Ulriksen's general point is correct, although it is not clear that these data are precisely comparable; some expenditures (contributory programmes and workfare) seem to be missing from the data on Botswana, whilst the Mauritian data seem to include not only payments on social insurance and social assistance expenditures (i.e. 'social benefits') but also other unidentified forms of 'welfare'.

Most recently, Ulriksen (2016) emphasizes the inadequacy of redistribution through the state in relation to persisting poverty.

In contrast, the World Bank's Garcia and Moore – in their survey of cash transfers in Africa – summarised that “Botswana has one of the most extensive social grant systems in the region, including separate programs for elderly people, orphans, and people living with disabilities” (2012: 227). A jointly-researched World Bank study of Botswana refers to its “mature and complex social protection system” (BIDPA & World Bank, 2013: x). In comparison with almost all African countries, social protection in Botswana covers a large proportion of the population. Devereux also assesses that “by African standards, Botswana implements an unusually comprehensive set of social welfare programmes for its poor and vulnerable citizens” (2007: 554). Holm & Morgan (1985) and Munemo (2012) emphasize the effective and programmatic response of the Botswana government to drought-induced poverty from the 1980s (see also Hay, 1988; Lewis, 1993: 19; Teklu, 1995). Munemo contrasts Botswana's programmatic policies with those in Kenya and Zimbabwe, generally characterized by the use of selective patronage. De Waal describes Botswana's “anti-famine political contract” as “the most robust such system in Africa, anchored by political commitment, a sense of administrative obligation and accountability through participatory structures and electoral politics” (1997: 43). Indeed, he assesses, Botswana's response to famine in the early 1980s was “arguably the greatest success in famine prevention in Africa” (*ibid*: 44, see also 26) – although he proceeds to criticize post-1984 reforms to Botswana's drought relief strategy. Even Bar-On (2002) acknowledged that social protection in Botswana expanded in the 1990s, in contrast to what he saw as the global trend. Seleka *et al.* (2007: 33) calculate that government transfers reduced the poverty headcount rate in 2002/03 by 10 percentage points, from about 40 percent to about 30 percent.

Unsurprisingly, these contrasting scholarly assessments are mirrored in the verdicts of Botswana's political parties. The Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) – which has governed since independence – emphasizes how “government continues to address problems of poverty and destitution by targeting the vulnerable and less fortunate members of the society through provision of cash transfers, food baskets, feeding schemes, shelter, labour based public works programmes”. Government programmes, in non-drought as well as drought years, provide “a clear demonstration that Government is serious in ensuring that available resources are shared with those who are worse-off in our society”.³ On the other hand, opposition

³ 2013 Budget Speech.

parties and the trade union movement bemoan the limits to the country's social programmes and promise expansion (e.g. BFTU, 2007; UDC, 2014).

These contrasting assessments of social protection in Botswana mirror the contrasting assessments of its overall experience under BDP governments. For one set of scholars, Botswana is a prime example of “developmental patrimonialism” (Kelsall, 2011): A generally efficient and democratic developmental state ensured that mining drove rapid economic growth and poverty reduction (Taylor, 2005; Hillbom, 2012a, 2012b). A second set of scholars are more skeptical, pointing to deepening authoritarianism and rising inequalities (e.g. Good, 1996, 1999b, 2008, 2016; Good & Taylor, 2008; Taylor, 2012).

There is merit in both sets of assessments. Viewed in terms of public expenditure on social protection, Botswana lags behind many other middle-income countries in Africa (and elsewhere), although less dramatically than Ulriksen and others have suggested.⁴ Viewed in terms of the overall coverage of institutionalized programmes, however, Botswana seems more of a frontrunner, with provision far exceeding that in most other African countries. Coverage is extensive but expenditure modest because primarily because most benefits are set at parsimonious levels. Poverty is reduced, but is not eliminated. This suggests that welfare states in Africa cannot simply be located on a one-dimensional continuum from minimal to extensive. Welfare states in Africa vary along multiple dimensions, including coverage, generosity, total expenditure and design.

This should be no surprise to comparative scholars of welfare state-building. In the 1990s, Esping-Andersen (1990, 1999) overturned the orthodox view that welfare states varied along only one dimension (‘effort’, measured in terms of expenditure), demonstrating that they varied in terms of their (re)distributional effects and implications for citizenship. The conservative welfare regimes of continental Europe, for example, were heavy spenders, but they perpetuated rather than eroded stratification both by class or status. They also perpetuated gendered differentiation within households by entrenching the model of male breadwinners and dependent female carers (see also Van Kersbergen, 2003).

⁴ Total public expenditure on contributory pensions and safety nets amounted to 3 percent of GDP in Botswana in 2012/13 (BIDPA and World Bank, 2013: xi). In the mid-2000s, total public expenditure on social benefits in Mauritius amounted to between 3 and 4 percent of GDP, with other (unidentified) expenditures on ‘welfare’ pushing this share up to between 5 and 6 percent of GDP (Mauritius, 2008).

Viewed comparatively, welfare states in much of Africa have tended to develop along a distinctive trajectory, spending heavily on education and (non-contributory) social assistance (including drought relief) rather than (contributory) social insurance. These welfare states are generally responses to the risks inherent in agrarian societies, with safety net programmes introduced in response to de-agrarianisation whether temporary (most often due to drought) or permanent (typically due to insufficient land or insufficient labour to farm), rather than to the risks inherent in industrialization. They are concerned more with the risks affecting peasants (and ex- or non-peasants in agrarian societies) rather than the risks affecting workers in formal employment (and ex- or non-workers in proletarianised societies) (Seekings, forthcoming). African countries differ, however, in terms of precisely how they spend through social assistance programmes. Botswana's welfare state has been shaped by almost fifty years of rule by the conservative – but also modestly benign – BDP. Under the BDP, and buoyed by rapid economic growth, the social contract in Botswana was fashioned (or refashioned) along broadly conservative lines, ensuring widespread but parsimonious inclusion in an otherwise (and increasingly) unequal society. Viewed in comparison with welfare regimes in Europe in the twentieth century, Botswana has more in common with Christian Democratic regimes than with social democratic ones.⁵

Welfare policies in Botswana have long revolved around three major components (as we shall see in more detail below): workfare for able-bodied, working-age adults (originally food-for-work, more recently cash-for-work); 'supplementary' feeding programmes for designated 'vulnerable groups' (children, together with pregnant and lactating mothers); and additional support for selected categories of people (initially support along the lines of poor relief for 'destitutes', and more recently universal old-age pensions and support for orphans, i.e. for categories of people who have ceased to be supported adequately by kin and cannot support themselves). In contrast to neighbouring South Africa, there is no general child support grant paying benefits to poor mothers or caregivers. Overall, the welfare state in Botswana has the following characteristics:

- Extensive coverage: As the BDP government emphasizes, as much as one half of the population receives food and about 10 percent of the population receives other social assistance benefits even in non-drought years, with the proportions rising in drought years. The proportion of the population receiving cash benefits is much lower than in neighbouring South Africa, but it is high by comparison with

⁵ This comparison was suggested by Tlou, Parsons and Henderson (1995).

most African countries, and the coverage of feeding programmes is also relatively high.

- Some of the benefits are parsimonious, as critics emphasise: The old age pension was introduced in 1996 at Pula 100/month; as of 2012 it was worth P250/month; by comparison, the pension in South Africa paid Rand 430/month from mid-1996 and R1200/month in mid-2012, when the Pula and Rand had approximately the same value; similarly, workfare ‘wages’ are low relative to South Africa; on the other hand, whilst the value of the cash component of the destitute grant is tiny, the value of the food basket (or coupons) paid under this programme and under the Orphan Care Programme is much higher. The underlying logic behind a generally parsimonious approach was set out explicitly in the 2002 Revised National Policy on Destitute Persons: The state provides ‘minimum assistance’ to ‘genuine destitute persons’ (Botswana, 2002: 2).
- There is an enduring (although no longer complete) preference for benefits in kind rather than cash: Programmes originally provided benefits in kind only (including food-for-work and food baskets for ‘destitutes’ and orphans, as well as the feeding schemes themselves), and only later changed to pay cash (workfare from 1982) or to include a cash component (destitute relief); the old-age pensions were paid entirely in cash from the outset, in 1996; more recently, food baskets have been replaced with food coupons (similar to food stamps); the cash benefit for destitutes remains tiny (P90/month from 2012) compared to the value of the food basket/coupons (between P500 and P700/month depending on household size).
- Workfare plays a central role in the welfare state: If households include able-bodied working-age adults, then they are expected to work for relief (although this has sometimes been relaxed during bad droughts).
- Some programmes are universal (the old-age pension, Orphan Care Programme and most of the feeding schemes), whilst others are means-tested, either directly (destitutes grants) or because the low benefits ensure self-targeting by the very poor (workfare).
- Programmes assume and respect the centrality of the family: workfare is designed to enable a working-age adult breadwinner to support his or her familial dependents; the destitutes programme is intended to support households where there is no able-bodied, working age adult; pensions and orphan support became necessary because they fell outside families, in the case of the elderly because of shrinkage in the ‘extended’ family; whilst familial, programmes are not inherently

patriarchal, i.e. there is no assumption that the breadwinner is male; indeed, women predominated in workfare programmes.

- None of the social assistance programmes are statutory, i.e. none are based in legislation; this may be due to the concern not to generate any sense of entitlement.⁶
- There is no separate ministry for social welfare; most safety nets have been administered by the Department of Local Government.

Most (but not all) of these characteristics are distinctively ‘conservative’: Coverage might be extensive, but there is a paternalistic preference for benefits in kind, a clear emphasis on workfare and the family, and most benefits are parsimonious. Much of the welfare state, and the ‘destitutes’ policy in particular, were reminiscent of the poor laws of nineteenth century Britain. In addition, the BDP government developed a distinctively conservative welfare doctrine to justify its interventions, as we shall see below.

This paper examines why Botswana has developed this conservative welfare state. Section 2 summarises the origins of welfare programmes in drought relief in the 1960s and 1970s. The colonial and then post-colonial states organized food-for-work programmes, ‘supplementary’ feeding programmes and discretionary relief for ‘destitutes’. The BDP elaborated a conservative doctrine of welfare provision. Section 3 examines the institutionalization of a ‘safety net’ in the 1990s and early 2000s, in response to both further episodes of drought and chronic poverty. Section 4 considers debates over welfare provision c2010, pointing to reforms that were proposed but not effected.⁷ Sections 5 through 7 assess three sets of factors that contribute to the particular form of the welfare state in Botswana. Section 5 examines the economic context, reviewing the extent of need and the issue of affordability. Section 6 considers Tswana culture, the doctrine developed by the BDP, and the character of the BDP. Section 7 examines the importance of partisan competition through regular elections.

⁶ I am grateful to Isaac Chinyoka for this point.

⁷ This paper focuses on the period up to about 2010. More recent reforms and debates are discussed by Hamer (2016).

2. Drought relief and the foundations of the welfare state

The three major components of public welfare provision in Botswana – i.e. workfare for able-bodied, working-age adults, ‘supplementary’ feeding programmes for designated ‘vulnerable groups’ and additional support for selected categories of people (especially the elderly) – date back to the mid-1960s, when independence from colonial rule coincided with terrible drought and famine. The BDP assumed executive power following elections in March 1965, with Seretse Khama as Prime Minister. Hitherto, responsibility for drought relief had been delegated to the chiefs, who enjoyed more extensive powers and responsibilities in Bechuanaland than in most of East and Southern Africa. Using local taxes paid to the ‘native treasuries’, chiefs could cope with intermittent, local disasters, but were unable to cope with the scale of the disaster in 1965-66. Remittances from migrants in South Africa were insufficient to purchase imported food, and people could not turn to local kin because they too were affected. The result was that mass famine and cattle mortality threatened. In April 1965, it was estimated that 20,000 ‘destitute’ people (out of a total population of 600,000) would need food. By May, this figure had tripled to 60,000. The government requested supplies of food (and stockfeed for cattle) from the newly-established United Nations agency the World Food Programme (WFP). In September, the estimated number of destitute people requiring food rose to 105,000, and a supplementary request was made to the WFP. Emergency funds were also received from the British government and UK-based charities, and some funds were raised locally. By the end of the year, after the rains had again failed, it seemed that more than half of the population would require food aid by mid-1966. A further request was made of the WFP. Massive support from the WFP and elsewhere – with an estimated value of at least 2 percent of GDP – averted starvation, although one-third of the country’s cattle did die (Seekings, 2016a).

As it became clear, in early 1966, that famine would continue beyond the scope of a WFP ‘emergency operation’, the BDP government and the WFP together designed a suite of ‘developmental’ programmes. First, feeding programmes provided directly for pre-school and primary school children, and pregnant and lactating mothers (and, later, tuberculosis patients also). Secondly, food-for-work programmes provided rations to working-age adults working on ‘self-help’ projects, building school facilities, roads, etc.; the rations were intended to support entire households. In addition, assistance was expanded for other ‘destitutes’ who were unable to work on grounds of age or infirmity (*ibid*).

Compared to the mid- and late-1960s, the 1970s were years of relatively good rains and harvests. The country's cattle herds grew rapidly. Drought did not disappear, however, and the government began to institutionalise its relief programmes. The regular feeding programmes expanded steadily through the late 1960s and 1970s, reaching 250,000 people by the end of the decade. Food-for-work programmes stopped and started, until 1978 when a decision was made to establish a regular food-for-work programme to operate in non-drought as well as drought years (*ibid*). The government also sought to formalize its support for 'destitutes' who were unable to work, and who needed support in good years as well as bad. In 1974 the responsible Minister asked his cabinet colleagues to decide "whether the nation has reached that stage of economic and social advancement at which it can afford to begin succouring at the end of their lives the very poorest people of all". Although he believed "that the time has come to take a major step towards implementing a genuine long-term programme of relief for the chronically destitute", there was some opposition from the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (whose minister was the Vice-President, Quett Masire), and most of the proposed reforms to the 'destitutes' programme were shelved.⁸

The government's priority in the 1970s was economic growth, and it constructed a developmental state to promote this goal. At first the government focused on the cattle industry, which the colonial state had begun to nurture prior to independence. The BDP government had already nationalized the country's only abattoir, and now proceeded to invest heavily in boreholes to improve water supplies (Peters, 1994). The government also initiated more general infrastructural development (in part through the Accelerated Rural Development Programme [ARDP] from 1973). Many of the BDP leaders and bureaucrats acquired large cattle ranches. In the 1970s, the government's focus slowly shifted to mining, with production beginning in Orapa and Selebi-Phikwe. In the late 1970s, the government became increasingly concerned with employment, and extended its support to other sectors in order to promote economic diversification. It also began to invest in agricultural modernisation in arable farming. This, and attempts to restrain urban wages, were explicitly intended to discourage rural to urban migration (Danevad, 1993). The result was growing inequality, as the incomes of the rich and even the formally-employed working-class grew sharply, with only modest benefits trickling down to the poor. Cattle-holdings became more and more unequal, and the proportion of families without any cattle grew steadily (Colclough & McCarthy, 1980: 111-14).

⁸ Botswana National Archives (BNA), OP 28/6: 'Social Welfare: "Chronic" Destitutes', Draft Cabinet Memorandum drafted by Ministry of Local Government and Lands, 7th February 1974, and signed by the Minister, K.P. Morake, and subsequent correspondence.

The government's enthusiasm for growth extended to heavy investment in basic services, i.e. in primary education and health care, as well as in water supplies which were symbolically important, the "manifestation of the benign power of *goromente* (government)" (Gulbrandsen, 2012: 200). But there remained within the state a widespread concern that state generosity towards the poor might undermine production by fostering laziness (see Seekings, 2016b). The government's preferred poverty-reduction policies were public education and subsidies for small farmers (Selolwane, 2012). This seems to have contributed to the state's hesitation in the face of warnings to plan for the recurrence of major drought. When rains failed in 1978-79, the state was slow to mount a large-scale relief programme. When, in May 1979, Khama finally did declare a countrywide drought, he insisted that relief measures were "not going to be hand-outs to the able-bodied people and those capable of looking after themselves, but drought relief provisions necessary to ensure the survival of the disadvantaged sections of our society".⁹ Drought relief expanded rapidly, reaching about 530,000 people – or 80 percent of the population (Gooch & Macdonald, 1981: 5). The drought pushed the government to formalize both its public works and destitutes programmes. An ongoing Labour-Intensive Public Works Programme was initiated on the eve of the drought, and expanded dramatically during the drought years.¹⁰ It would ensure minimal incomes for households with adults capable of work, in non-drought as well as drought years. A new National Policy on Destitute Persons, eventually finalized in late 1980, made provision for any individual "who is rendered helpless due to natural disaster or temporary hardship", and had neither assets (with a limit of four cows) nor close kin to support them. Benefits were provided in kind, with rations of food and other essential goods, were set at explicitly 'minimum' levels, and were limited to one recipient per household. They were also discretionary, following an assessment by a social worker and registration as 'destitute'.¹¹ The new policy continued to attract criticism, on the grounds that able-bodied adults facing 'temporary hardship' should be compelled to work on public works programmes rather than receive 'hand-outs' (e.g. Gooch & Macdonald, 1981), but the policy reflected the practice in times when the state struggled to organize public works programmes on the required scale. The government also initiated a culling programme to pay for elderly or weak cattle, distributing the meat as food aid (Munemo, 2012: 144-50).

⁹ BNA, OP/21/2: "Official Drought Declaration" of 25th May 1979.

¹⁰ Budget was set aside for the LIPW programme from 1978/79, under the 4th *National Development Plan*, 1976-81 (Botswana, 1975). The LIPW later came to be known as Labour-Based Drought Relief.

¹¹ I have been unable to locate a copy of the actual policy. This summary is based on the description in the later, 2002, Revised National Policy (Botswana, 2002) and in Gooch & Macdonald (1981).

When Seretse Khama died, in mid-1980, the state was massively involved in the de-commodification of its citizens through providing a safety net that was wide – and very wide during times of extreme drought – but also parsimonious and paternalistic, providing benefits in kind, through workfare wherever feasible. This was a welfare state that insured its citizens against the risk (of drought) that was most pressing in a still largely rural society. This was *not* a welfare state that insured its citizens primarily against the risks associated with urbanization and industrialization. Drought intermittently pushed into poverty households that were headed by working-age, able-bodied adults. Food-for-work programmes providing rations for a single adult per household were intended to strengthen families, not compensate for family breakdown. At the same time, the state accepted responsibility for children and mothers and for ‘destitute’ people who were unable to work. The state did so parsimoniously, however. As a report on the government’s drought-relief operation emphasized, the benefits paid on public works programmes should be “low enough to discourage those who had alternative means of support from coming forward, while enabling those affected by the drought to survive”, and should not be higher than the prevailing wage for unskilled labour in normal years. The rations for destitutes could be even smaller, because destitutes needed fewer calories than adults on public employment programmes (Gooch & Macdonald, 1981: 126, 129).

The drought of the mid and late 1960s also shaped the development, within the government and BDP, of a conservative welfare doctrine (Seekings, 2016b, and below). The drought added to the pressure on the BDP government to articulate the relationships between and respective responsibilities of citizens and state. Crucially, the state assumed responsibilities supposedly undertaken hitherto by the chiefs. It also adapted existing understandings of chiefly authority and responsibility to accommodate the new state institutions. The result was a doctrine that represented the state as benign, with clear responsibilities to the poor, but at the same time emphasized the responsibilities of the poor themselves to contribute to their own welfare.

Khama was succeeded as president by his vice-president (and Minister of Finance and Development Planning), Quett Masire. Masire himself seems to have been more concerned with growth and less with redistribution than Khama, but his first years in office were also ones of sustained drought, from 1981 to 1986. Arable production fell by two-thirds. The government responded by expanding its drought relief and recovery programmes: Feeding programmes were extended to provide meals for school children over weekends and during school holidays; the public employment programme was expanded, and also introduced cash payments

alongside food rations (from 1982, in part to compensate farmers for lost cash earnings – Munemo, 2012: 153); and more generous food parcels were distributed to much larger numbers of ‘destitutes’ (as well as ‘remote area dwellers’, i.e. the very poor San).

The 1980s drought was reminiscent of the mid-1960s. “The current drought, now in the fourth year running, has decimated arable agriculture and is having a severe impact on the national cattle herd”, wrote President Masire in his foreword to the 6th *National Development Plan* (for 1985-91); “strenuous efforts have been made to ensure that the population, especially vulnerable groups, has been adequately fed during this period” (Botswana, 1985). Three hundred thousand cattle had died by 1984, with mortality rates highest among small herds (*ibid*: 177-8) – but not one person died:

‘Botswana’s institutionalised feeding programmes were expanded considerably during the 1980s drought years as a preventive measure to assist the designated Vulnerable Groups. By the end of NDP5, a total of 365,000 people were receiving supplementary rations ..., with provision also made for some 208,000 school children and 20,000 Remote Area Dwellers. Thus about 55% of the population were benefiting from feeding programmes through schools, health facilities and other distribution mechanisms. Of the beneficiaries, some 36,000 were assisted under the destitute category, i.e. having been assessed by Community Development staff as being unable to work and lacking any other means of support. ... By the end of NDP5, the various supplementary feeding programmes were requiring 45-50,000 tonnes of foodstuffs annually (mostly cereals), and were accounting for 20-25% of the staple foods available in the country’.

In addition to school children and ‘remote area dwellers’, 365,000 people in designated ‘vulnerable groups’ received supplementary food. These included 52,000 lactating mothers, 23,000 pregnant women, 152,00 pre-school children and 93,000 school-age children not attending school, 9,000 TB patients, 9,000 ‘regular’ destitutes and another 27,000 ‘drought-induced destitutes’, and 4,000 other ‘malnourished children’ (*ibid*: 87).¹² About 42,000 adults were employed on the Labour-Intensive Public Works in 1985/86, and 92,000 in 1986/87, with an additional 9,000 working on a separate de-stumping programme (Botswana, 1991:

¹² The Table shows a total of 375,000, not 365,000 beneficiaries (Botswana, 1985: 87, Table 4.4).

452). Later (in 1986), the state also assisted farmers to resume production through the Accelerated Rainfed Development Programme (ARAP).

As in the late 1980s, drought relief was followed by drought recovery efforts: “The scale of dependency is expected to decline markedly when the drought breaks, but many farming households are expected to have difficulties in regaining their former levels of production to the loss of assets, particularly livestock, and to other factors such as the migration of the most productive workers away from the farming sector” (Botswana, 1985: 20-21). These programmes were run through existing, largely bureaucratic structures, not by politicians. “By the time President Masire declared that the drought had broken in 1988, the government has provided free food to over 556,000 Batswana each year, mitigated lost incomes for roughly 20 percent of the population through labour-based relief, and ploughed, de-stumped, weeded or fenced a combined 500,000 hectares of land under ARAP” (Munemo, 2012: 2; see also Hay, 1988).

The scale of these relief programmes dwarfed even those of the mid- and late 1960s. The 1985/86 Household Income and Expenditure Survey – conducted several years into the drought – found that the real incomes of the poorest households in rural areas had probably declined since the mid-1970s, but the fact that the observed decline was modest seemed to be “an achievement to the credit of the government’s drought relief policies” (Harvey & Lewis, 1990: 282). Botswana’s drought relief programme was widely acclaimed as a great success, and a good example of the general dictum that democracies do not permit drought to lead to deaths on a large scale (e.g. Dreze & Sen, 1989; Teklu, 1995; De Waal, 1997).

Through this period most ‘drought relief’ was paid for through the WFP. The WFP’s feeding programmes for primary school children and vulnerable groups – which had been running without interruption since 1965/66, in non-drought as well as drought years – were expanded, with the budget for the three years from 1985 through 1987 rising from \$14 million to \$44 million.¹³ A series of additional, much smaller, emergency programmes operated from 1982 through 1988.¹⁴ Because Botswana was still classified as a less developed country, it received along with food aid a subsidy for the transport and storage of the food aid inside Botswana.

¹³ WFP programme 324 EXP III.

¹⁴ WFP emergency operations 1291, 1394, 1394 EXP, 1450, 3472; plus operations for refugees.

3. Institutionalising the safety net

Under presidents Masire (1980-98) and Mogae (1998-2008), the BDP government continued to emphasise economic growth, but at the same time moved to ‘institutionalise’ further welfare provision in two respects: financial responsibility was transferred within the WFP to the government, and new policies were introduced to fill the holes in the existing safety net based on drought relief. In 1985, concluding their study of the drought relief programmes, Holm & Morgan had assessed that:

‘Drought relief is coming to assume a role in Botswana politics comparable to education and welfare in the industrialised countries. Indeed, it is already so popular that the leaders of the BDP have resisted pressures for cuts from bureaucrats. It will be difficult for the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, which quite naturally concerns itself with balancing the budget, to find a politically acceptable way of reducing the various relief programmes, once the drought is over’ (Holm & Morgan, 1985: 476).

Holm & Morgan were soon proved correct as the government not only prepared for further droughts but also moved to address more fully the challenge of chronic poverty. Old age pensions were introduced in 1996, assistance for orphans soon after, and provision for destitutes was reformed in 2002. By the early 2000s drought relief programmes had extended into a permanent welfare state, funded from domestic revenues, not from external aid or agencies.

The 1985/86 survey data revealed that poverty remained widespread and deep. More than one in three Batswana were living in poverty, using a poverty line of US\$1.25 per day (adjusted for purchasing power parity). Using a \$2 per day poverty line, the poverty rate was 55 percent. The poverty gap was 14 percent, using the \$1.25/day poverty line – meaning that the elimination of poverty would require the perfectly-targeted redistribution of 14 percent of the national income from the rich to the poor. Using a \$2 per day poverty line, the poverty gap was 26 percent.¹⁵ Redistributive government (and other) programmes amounted to a very small fraction of this. As the 7th National Development Plan (1991-97) noted, poverty persisted even in years of good rain, indicating ‘a structural poverty problem’ (Botswana, 1991: 17).

¹⁵ WDI.

Social justice required government action: “The ultimate aim of economic development is to improve the quality of life for all Batswana” (*ibid*: 33).

‘Every citizen is entitled to a minimum standard of life that is consistent with human dignity. That dignity requires that, as far as possible, people should be enabled to reach such a standard through their own efforts. Wherever possible, Government assistance is aimed at enabling people to become self-sufficient, but there are times and cases where direct income support is necessary – in ensuring that no one goes hungry during a drought, for example, and in providing relief for destitutes’ (*ibid*: 385).

The priority was raising earnings, but where necessary these would be supplemented:

‘Government food aid, its drought relief and recovery programmes, and other aid measures targeted for the destitute are intended to supplement the incomes of the very poor in order to ensure that their disposable incomes, both cash and in kind, provide them with a minimum standard of living. The need for such income supplements, especially for the aged, the destitute and the handicapped, will continue; but the objective of development is to improve incomes derived from production so that income supplements, and the dependency on Government often associated with them, can be reduced (*ibid*: 33). ... The promotion of employment opportunities in the rural areas will be accompanied by measures of targeted relief for those who do not benefit from the expansion of the rural economy ... Existing assistance measures will be consolidated into a simple, single-channel “safety net”, based on strict eligibility criteria, for disadvantaged households. This assistance can then be expanded during drought to protect basic needs and the productive assets of vulnerable households’ (*ibid*: 89).

As in the late 1960s and 1970s, drought in the 1980s drove both the expansion of public programmes and increased anxiety among conservative elites over ‘dependency’ on ‘handouts’.

The slow withdrawal of the WFP

Policy reform was driven in large part by the threatened (and finally effected) withdrawal of the WFP and ensuing transfer to the Government of Botswana of

financial responsibility for drought relief and related welfare programmes. This required that the additional budgetary demands of drought relief and related programmes be anticipated, through advance financial and organizational planning.

The WFP had raised with the Government of Botswana the issue of the transfer of financial responsibility as early as 1983. During the visit to Botswana of a WFP mission to evaluate the WFP's expensive school and vulnerable group feeding programmes, the Government of Botswana agreed that it would take more responsibility for the school feeding programme, specifically by providing the sorghum required, and would also target the vulnerable groups feeding programme more selectively.¹⁶ But the deepening and enduring drought meant that the start-date for the reform was postponed, repeatedly, and the Government even applied successfully for a series of big increases in the WFP programme budget.¹⁷

In 1987, in the application to the WFP for a further three years of assistance for its school and vulnerable group feeding programmes, the Government of Botswana committed itself to the gradual assumption of responsibility for the supply of food over the three-year period (1988 to 1991).¹⁸ In practice, this does not seem to have happened, even after July 1988, when the drought finally broke and the drought relief programme became a drought recovery programme. The WFP anticipated that the Government of Botswana would request yet another extension of the school and vulnerable group feeding programmes, and envisaged that the WFP would insist on a plan for 'phasing out' its assistance. In 1992, when the Government of Botswana applied for another five years of WFP support, it proposed that the WFP contribution would be reduced over the period, from 90 percent to 30 percent, with WFP food aid targeted on the most disadvantaged schools.¹⁹ At about the same time the UN's declassification of Botswana as a less developed country meant that Botswana no longer qualified for a subsidy of its internal food transport and storage operations. Botswana was, however, given a three-year transitional period.

¹⁶ 'Interim Evaluation Summary Report: Botswana 324 EXP II', Agenda Item 16, 17th Session of WFP Committee on Food Aid, Rome, 28 May – 8 June 1984.

¹⁷ 'Budget increases for CFA approval: Botswana 324 EXP 3', Agenda Item 14b, 21st Session of WFP Committee on Food Aid, Rome, 26 May – 6 June 1986.

¹⁸ 'Project Botswana 324 (EXP.4)', submitted to WFP Committee on Food Aid for approval, at 23rd Session of the CFA, Rome, 25 May – 5 June 1987.

¹⁹ 'Project Botswana 324 (Exp. 5)', submitted to WFP Committee on Food Aid for approval, at 33rd Session of the CFA, Rome, 25-29 May 1992.

The withdrawal of the WFP compelled the Government of Botswana to budget more fully for drought relief and other welfare programmes. The 6th NDP, adopted in the middle of the drought, had budgeted for drought as a discrete line-item for 1985/86, 1986/87 and 1987/88 (Botswana, 1985: 70). The 7th NDP was adopted during a period of good rain, but the changing relation to the WFP meant that it nonetheless had to plan not only for chronic feeding programmes (taken over from the WFP) but also for emergency drought relief on the assumption that drought would recur at some time during the period covered by the plan. Munemo (2012: 12) describes this as signaling the government's 'standing commitment' to respond to droughts in a programmatic and non-discretionary manner. Indeed, when drought next recurred, in 1992-93, the state had prepared its programmatic response well. More than 400,000 people received food aid and about 100,000 people were employed in the reactivated drought relief projects (BFTU, 2007, citing official sources).²⁰ This was to be the last drought during which Botswana received WFP food aid.²¹ The Government's planning was a response to the withdrawal of the WFP and acknowledgement of the imperative of continuing the programmes funded hitherto by the WFP. The Government's commitment was to spend its own money, not to introduce new programmes.

The WFP as well as the Government were anxious about 'dependency' on food aid within Botswana, and possible disincentives to production.²² A WFP programme evaluation team in 1986/87 felt the need to address concerns about negative effects:

'On the whole, the evidence gathered by the mission in its field visits provides no basis for concern at this time regarding the possible disincentive effects of the various relief measures, including food aid. On the contrary, the mission was informed on several occasions that, in areas suitable for arable agriculture, labour available for relief projects tended to be scarce during the ploughing and harvest seasons, despite the relative attractiveness of the wage offered. Nevertheless, there is a danger that undue prolongation of the relief programme, with its massive coverage and the open-ended nature of some of its activities, would tend

²⁰ Kerapeletswe and Moremi (2001: 233-4) suggest that the LBPWP had a target of 156,400 jobs but less than 90,000 were created, primarily in small-scale construction.

²¹ Emergency Operation 5060 on top of the ongoing feeding programmes 324 EXP IV and V.

²² The government reportedly commissioned a study of dependency in 1985: Hay *et al.*, 'A socio-economic assessment of drought relief in Botswana, 1985', report for the Inter-Ministerial Drought Committee, cited in Hay (1988: 1115).

to increase the dependency on government assistance of the rural population'.²³

The following application to the WFP for a further 'expansion' of the feeding and vulnerable groups feeding programmes explicitly considered 'disincentives, displacement and dependency':

'WFP food will be provided only to clearly identified target groups with low food intakes. Taking into account the general food shortage in the country, WFP food rations will represent additional consumption and should not have negative effects on markets'.²⁴

The application also reported that "both the Government and the WFP have expressed concern about the creation of dependency on free food distribution among the rural population". The Government would cut the number of vulnerable group feeding programme beneficiaries from their high, drought levels, perhaps through the introduction of targeting the vulnerable group feeding programme.²⁵ These points were reiterated three years later in the application for a fifth extension to the school and vulnerable group feeding programmes.²⁶

Providing for the deserving poor

As the transfer of responsibility of feeding programmes from the WFP to the Government's own budget became more imminent, the Government was compelled to think more carefully about the design of its programmes. On the one hand, it was concerned not to perpetuate 'dependency', which might entail more precise targeting of some programmes. On the other, it was forced to consider which citizens were 'deserving', and especially which chronically poor citizens were deserving of support in non-drought as well as drought years. The result was not so much the institutionalization of welfare programmes as their reform through re-specification.

²³ 'Interim Evaluation Summary Report: Botswana 324 EXP 3', Agenda Item 16, 23rd Session of WFP Committee on Food Aid, Rome, 25 May – 5 June 1987.

²⁴ 'Project Botswana 324 (EXP.4)', submitted to WFP Committee on Food Aid for approval, at 23rd Session of the CFA, Rome, 25 May – 5 June 1987.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ 'Project Botswana 324 (Exp.5)', submitted to WFP Committee on Food Aid for approval, at 33rd Session of the CFA, Rome, 25-29 May 1992.

The dilemma was set out explicitly in the 7th NDP (1991-1997). The Plan recorded a strong commitment to social justice and concern over the decline of extended family support, envisaging a ‘social safety net’ and making specific budgetary provision for childcare (Botswana, 1991: 386). Here the government faced the dilemma: ‘The major challenges Government faces is to ensure that the temporary reliance of vulnerable groups on drought relief does not become a permanent dependency’ (*ibid*: 389). Across most of Africa, post-colonial governments were wary of encouraging laziness and ‘dependency’ by providing overly generous assistance (‘handouts’) to households with able-bodied, working-age adults. Khama, Masire and the BDP emphasized the importance of ‘self-help’ and ‘self-reliance’, and the need to balance individuals’ responsibility to work with the government’s responsibility to provide for those who were unable to support themselves (Seekings, 2016b). Feeding programmes for children and other ‘vulnerable’ groups were less controversial, although there was some discussion over the scope of the programmes and especially whether they needed to be better targeted on the poor. The Government took over full financial responsibility for these from the WFP in 1997. Provision for ‘destitutes’, on the other hand, had always been more controversial. The government did nudge up the value of the benefit, from a paltry P30/month to an only slightly less paltry P45/month in 1990 (Botswana, 1991: 389). The big question, however, was whether there were specific groups of people for whom the destitutes policy was no longer adequate.

Provision for the elderly

The most pressing group of chronically destitute were the elderly. Hitherto, Botswana’s safety nets were based on the assumptions that most elderly people either supported themselves or were supported by their kin and the small number of exceptions was covered adequately by provision for ‘destitutes’. Social and economic change made both assumptions doubtful. In April 1988, after years of drought, one of the appointed BDP Members of Parliament, Clara Olsen, proposed the motion “that this Hon House requests Government to introduce old age pensions”. Children should look after their elders; the pension would pay for basics, and “it is up to the children to provide the many extras in life that are required to make our older citizens enjoy a full and satisfying life, including love and warmth”. She also noted the ‘growing phenomenon’ of older people dying alone and unattended. Botswana might be a young and poor country but (she suggested) the time had come for introduce care for the elderly. Pensions were often the first form of social security introduced in a country, and neighbouring

South Africa had a pension programme. The motion was supported by MPs from both the BDP and opposition parties. The Minister of Finance and Development Planning said that he supported the motion, although he worried about the financial implications. The motion was passed.²⁷

There was no indication that the government did much in response to the parliamentary debate and motion. The 7th NDP (1991-1997) had not mentioned any possible provision for the elderly, despite recording a strong commitment to social justice and concern over the decline of extended family support.²⁸

The Ministry of Health, however, did encourage research into poverty among the elderly, which was presented at a workshop in Gaborone in 1993 (and then published, as Bruun, Mugabe and Coombes, 1994). The Deputy Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Health opened the workshop, which was attended by civil servants from several other ministries also. An official in the Department of Health presented some of the results (Ngome, 1994), and several other officials participated in a panel discussion on ministerial responsibility for the elderly.

Researchers reported at the workshop that many elderly people were impoverished. In one village west of Gaborone, half of the elderly had no cattle, many had no small stock, and more than one-third had no chickens. Widows were especially vulnerable, because their sons would often sell stock when their fathers died. Few elderly people were registered as destitute (Ingstad, 1994). Elderly people could not rely on support from their children. Sons who were migrants often failed to support their widowed mothers. Elderly people told researchers that “children ... no longer know who their parents are”; “our children do not seem to care much about us; we are forced to sit back and wait for any form of relief, hoping that the Government has also not forgotten us”. But the government apparently also ‘does not know that old people exist’. The community was also less supportive than in the past: “Everybody minds their own business these days” (quoted in Ngome, 1994: 105-6). “Social change has devalued the aged”, found Guillette (1994: 119; see also Ingstad & Bruun, 1994). Lack of funds meant that elderly people could not get to the clinics where health care was provided for free (Tlou & Sandberg, 1994).

A few researchers called explicitly for old-age pensions to replace existing provision for the destitute elderly. Ingstad & Bruun (1994) reported that elderly people “were not happy about getting food stamps [through destitutes relief]

²⁷ *Hansard*, 8th April 1988, pp.971-8.

²⁸ An Annex to the NDP reportedly identified ageing as a priority area.

because then they would be allocated poor quality food in the shop”, and instead wanted cash. These researchers called for a “more liberal” use of destitute support to support the elderly, and the introduction of a pension for elderly people “who have reached an age where it is obviously impossible for them to maintain a decent standard of living by their own work only” (77-8; see also Raditladi, 1994).

The workshop seems to have encouraged the BDP government to consider seriously the possibility of a reform. Following the 1993 workshop, an inter-ministerial working group was reportedly set up to continue discussions over ministerial responsibilities to address the challenge of poverty among the elderly. The prospect of competitive elections in October 1994 seems to have provided additional impetus. The BDP manifesto for the 1994 elections included the promise at least to “study the feasibility and the affordability of an old age pension scheme” (BDP, 1994: 19, para 13.3). Following the elections, in April 1995, Masire declared the country to be drought-stricken again – after the BDP government had agreed to the phased withdrawal of WFP support (to be completed by 1997).

It came as a surprise, however, when the Minister of Finance and Development Planning (and Vice-President), Festus Mogae, announced in his budget speech in February 1996 that non-contributory old-age pensions would be introduced.²⁹ He opened his speech with a typical homily:

‘We are all aware that resources are scarce and have alternative or competing uses. Devoting more resources in one area will usually involve withdrawing some resources from another area. The essence of the economic policy making is therefore trying to make the “right” choices or strike the right balance. ... I have often insisted that development is a matter of mutual social responsibility and not simply a matter for Government alone, although Government has a significant role to play’.

Economic growth was modest, and inflationary pressures required that the government contain its expenditures. Nonetheless, the Government had decided to introduce an old age pension with effect from 1st October, 1996, paying P100 per month to all men and women over the age of 65.³⁰

²⁹ Masire had not mentioned pensions in his presidential address the previous November: *Hansard*, 6th Nov 1995, pp.4-15.

³⁰ *Hansard*, Monday 12th Feb 1996, pp.4-23.

At the time, it seems that Mogae had no clear idea of where the money would come from: “Studies are still being conducted to find how this pension that will cost in the region of P72 million a year will be funded”.³¹ Most of Mogae’s speech concerned the imperative of fiscal austerity: “Government must restrain the growth of expenditure in order to limit the inflationary pressures emanating from the budget and to leave more resources at the command of the private sector”. User fees might be introduced for some services provided to farmers and tariffs for water would probably need to increase. Public sector wages would be restrained.³²

Whilst most MPs were enthusiastic, one MP articulated the fear that government programmes were undermining hard work:

‘If I look beyond this drought I see a bleak picture because our people are no longer willing to engage in activities which can improve their lives. They just want to be engaged in drought relief programmes. I do not know whether it is because in the drought relief programme they work for six hours, talk to each other as they work, have time to relax within those six hours and go home happily knowing that they have earned their wage for that day, because it is not a job in the sense we now how jobs are executed. It is a job where there is a lot of relaxation and very little being done at the end of the day. This has instilled a habit on our people that is going to take a lot of time to fight off’.³³

In his memoirs, published a decade later, Masire wrote that the BDP was aware that ‘traditional’ support systems were withering, especially in the towns, and poverty was growing among the elderly. “We discussed the idea of an old age pension scheme for many years”, he wrote, but they were worried about funding:

‘By 1996, we felt that we had enough revenue coming from diamonds, and those funds belonged to all Batswana. So we discussed it and decided to go ahead. The payment had to be enough to meet reasonable needs, but we did not want it to be so large that people would just stop doing useful things, such as looking after children of relations while parents were working... The old age pension was one of the things that made a real difference to thousands of the poorest Batswana’ (Masire, 2006: 234).

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Mr M.R. Tshipinare (Ngwaketse West), *Hansard*, Monday 19th Feb 1996, p.8.

Masire provides little insight into why the government adopted this reform in the face of general fiscal austerity, and is silent as to the role of the WFP withdrawal in pushing the government to taking responsibility for poverty-mitigation programmes.

Provision for orphans

A second group of poor people who were inadequately covered by destitute relief was orphans. The Ministry of Local Government was tasked with keeping a register of orphans and providing them – and their foster families – with necessary food and other benefits in kind (such as school uniforms). AIDS resulted in a rapid increase in the number of orphans, but many were not registered, and were thus not covered even by the existing destitute relief. In 1998, it was thought that less than one half of all orphans were registered (25,000 out of 55,000). Moreover, the number of orphans from AIDS alone was projected to rise further to 65,000 by the year 2000 (Botswana, 1999: 26). Social Welfare Officers employed by the Ministry of Local Government were too busy implementing drought and destitute relief programmes, and had no time to register or to help orphans (*ibid*: 11). The unmet needs of orphans were revealed in 1998 at a National Conference on the Implications of Orphanhood and through a ‘Rapid Assessment’ of the needs of orphans conducted by the Ministry of Health. The Ministry of Local Government instructed district councils to extend destitute relief to orphans more effectively, but it was clear that more needed to be done. In March 1999, consultants for the Ministry of Local Government drafted a Short Term Plan of Action for Orphans, which was quickly approved by the government. The Plan focused on greatly expanding state capacity through the appointment of dedicated child welfare officers and committees. Later that year a new Orphan Care Programme (OCP) was initiated, to take over provision for orphans from general destitute relief. The OCP carried forward the existing focus on providing benefits in kind (primarily a food basket), and was also implemented by the Ministry of Local Government and District Councils. It seems that the OCP provided benefits that were similar to destitutes relief, but it facilitated access and, perhaps crucially, did not require any means test. This was a programme for any child who had been orphaned and thus was not being provided for by the immediate family. The OCP did, however, define orphans conservatively, as children to the age of eighteen who had lost *both* parents or had lost one parent only if the child had only had one parent. In other words, a child whose father had died but mother was alive would not qualify as an orphan, even if the father had been the breadwinner. The assumption was that either the extended

family would continue to provide for a single orphan, or the state would provide through the existing, familial combination of workfare and destitutes policy.³⁴

Through the 2000s there were about 50,000 orphans being supported under this programme (before the number declined in the 2010s, presumably as a consequence of improved treatment for AIDS). The cost of the programme rose sharply in the early 2000s. Although there were fewer beneficiaries than there were old-age pensioners, the cost of the food basket for orphans (and their foster families) was much higher than the value of an old-age pension, which meant that the total cost of the Orphan Care Programme was about the same as the total cost of the old-age pension scheme.

Provision for other destitutes

The initiation of new, dedicated programmes for the elderly and orphans and perhaps also the onset of yet another drought in 2001 (lasting until 2004) prompted reform of the destitutes policy in 2002. The Ministry of Local Government appointed a consultant to review the existing policy and propose reforms. The resulting Revised National Policy on Destitute Persons redefined a destitute person as:

- ‘(a) An individual who, due to disabilities or chronic health condition is unable to engage in sustainable economic activities and has insufficient assets and income sources.
- (b) An individual who due to (i) old age or (ii) mental or physical disability ..., or (iii) emotional or psychological disability, ... (iv) being a terminally ill patient, and having no other means of support, is incapable of engaging in a sustainable economic activity and has unreliable and limited source [sic] of income.
- (c) A child under 18 years who (i) is in need of care and may not be catered for under the orphan care program, [or] (ii) has parent(s) who are terminally ill and incapable of caring for the child, or (iii) has been abandoned and [is] in need of care and is not catered for under the orphan care programme’ (Botswana, 2002: 4-5).

Further categories of people were also deemed destitute, but only temporarily. ‘Temporary’ destitutes included not only people who were temporarily

³⁴ I am grateful to Isaac Chinyoka for help in understanding Botswana’s child welfare regime.

incapacitated, but also victims of droughts and other natural disasters and even people plunged into destitution by the death or illness of, or desertion by, their breadwinner. The old, 1980 policy had not distinguished between permanent and temporary destitutes. By introducing this distinction, the Revised Policy imposed some limits on the eligibility of able-bodied, working-age adults. The Operating Manual for the new policy listed some common ‘indicators of destitution’ to guide social welfare or development officers at the village and ward levels. These included ‘poor health and no one to care for them’, ‘house in poor shape and poorly cleaned’, ‘no firewood and no food being cooked’, ‘tattered blankets and clothing’, and children scavenging in dustbins or rubbish dumps.³⁵ Special provision was made for ‘needy children’ (other than orphans, who were covered by the OCP).

The Revised Policy raised the value of the food basket and introduced for the first time a modest cash benefit on the grounds that destitutes needed cash (for items such as toothpaste and paraffin) as well as food rations. ‘Permanent’ destitutes would receive benefits worth P212/month and ‘temporary’ destitutes would receive P182/month. Of these totals, P55 would be in cash, with the rest in kind. Destitutes in urban areas received slightly less than destitutes in rural areas. Destitutes with more dependents would receive a supplement. The means test was also adjusted (to allow applicants to possess more assets, because some people with some assets were nonetheless poor).³⁶ Destitutes would also be exempted from all fees for public services (medical, school, utilities). More emphasis was placed on ‘rehabilitation’.

When the Minister of Local Government (Dr Margaret Nasha) presented the proposed reforms to parliament,³⁷ she explained that the reforms were in response to social change. The document itself pointed to the change from destitution affecting isolated individuals to something that affected entire households, including even households with a few cattle (Botswana, 2002: 3). Policy-makers retained, however, an understanding of destitution as something that referred not only to objective poverty but also to potential delinquency, the result of a failure to take advantage of opportunities to improve one’s life. The 2002 Revised Policy may have been more generous than the 1980 version, but it remained highly moralistic. The Policy itself warned explicitly that

³⁵ *Operating Manual* for the Revised National Policy on Destitute Persons (July 2002) (Gaborone: Department of Social Services, Ministry of Local Government).

³⁶ Destitutes should have not more than 4 cattle or 24 sheep/goats, and an income (excluding any old age pension) of less than P120/month if living alone or less than P150/month if they had dependents.

³⁷ Debate on Draft Revised National Policy on Destitute Persons, *Hansard* vol. 139, no.5, Monday 22nd to Wednesday 24th July 2002. Many MPs spoke in Setswana.

‘there exists a fine line between providing destitute persons with a reasonable level of benefits that will motivate them to use their best efforts to escape the poverty trap on the one hand and reaching a level where those very same benefits serve as a disincentive to such persons making an effort to obtain a sustainable livelihood on the other hand’ (Botswana, 2002: 10).

It also listed the responsibilities of beneficiaries, which included “to make the most out of the rehabilitation opportunities that are provided by the Government” and “to make reasonable efforts to find sustainable employment if they are physically and mentally able” (*ibid*: 10-11). In the parliamentary debate, MPs (including the Speaker) pointed to abuses such as spending money on beer, and problems of mental incapacity. The moralistic paternalism of the policy did not go uncriticised. One MP made a passionate case for paying the entire allowance in cash, so that they could choose what food to buy:

‘It is as though we feel that destitutes are not responsible or intelligent people. Destitutes are ordinary people just like ourselves. They can think for themselves logically. They know exactly what they want. ... They are the same people who have the intelligence to go to the polls and vote for us. They vote for us and bring us into this Parliament. If you tell me that they cannot buy food for themselves, honestly, I think we are really demeaning our destitutes.’³⁸

This was a dissenting view, however. A majority of MPs approved the policy reform. The Policy itself specified appropriate actions to be taken if destitutes ‘flouted’ their responsibilities (Botswana, 2002: 11-12).

4. Reviewing the welfare state

The reforms over the decade between the mid-1990s and the mid-2000s further extended and institutionalized Botswana’s welfare state. The core pillars – workfare, supplementary feeding programmes and destitute relief – had originated decades earlier in response to drought, but were then steadily institutionalized as permanent features of public policy. The initiation of dedicated programmes for the elderly and orphans, and the reform of destitute relief, marked the further

³⁸ Michael Kefentse Mzwini (then BNF, MP for Gaborone North; subsequently BDP MP for Mmadinare), *Hansard*, Wednesday 24th July 2002, pp.173-4.

‘modernisation’ of the country’s welfare state. Existing feeding programmes also continued to expand. The government continued to expand its ‘safety net’ in some directions. At the same time it considered reforms to reduce its coverage and cost, and declined to implement further expansionary reforms advocated by civil society.

Survey data from 2002/03 suggested that one in three households in Botswana was receiving support from one or other programme (Seleka *et al.*, 2007), even though this figure probably did *not* cover all school feeding programmes. By 2009/10, the proportion had risen somewhat. In that year, 261,000 primary school students and 165,000 secondary school students were registered for the School Feeding Programme, and received at least one meal per day. Another 240,000 adults and pre-school children benefitted from the Vulnerable Group Feeding Programme. About 41,000 people were registered under the Destitute Persons Programme, more than 48,000 children were registered under the Orphan Care Programme, and there were more than 91,000 old-age pensioners. Another 43,000 people were enrolled in the Remote Area Development Programme, which provided rations as well as grants to facilitate small business activities. In 2010, soon after its launch, 19,000 people participated in *Ipelegeng* (Mupedziswa & Ntseane, 2013: 92-3). Although only about 10 percent of the population benefitted directly from cash (or ‘near-cash’) programmes, many of these supported large households, so the proportion of *indirect* beneficiaries was much larger. Given some overlap between programmes, it is likely that approximately one quarter of the population benefitted from school meals, and a similar proportion directly from other programmes, and a large majority of households benefitted from one or other programme.

Cash benefits remained parsimonious, however, especially in comparison with neighbouring South Africa (which had about the same real GDP per capita as Botswana). In Botswana, old age pensioners received P220 in 2010. The cash benefit for destitute persons was a meagre P81 per month in 2010. In South Africa, at the same time, the old-age pension (as well as the disability grant) was set at R1080 per month, and the child support grant was set at R250 per month. The daily wage on *Ipelegeng* was P18. In South Africa, in 2010, the daily allowance on the Community Public Works Programmes was R60. But the value of food aid in Botswana was not insignificant. The food parcel for destitute persons – intended for their whole household – was worth between P450 and P750 per month in 2010. Orphans received smaller food parcels, but these were worth about P216 per month (Mupedziswa & Ntseane, 2013: 92-3). The government also began to replace food baskets with ‘coupons’, including through a smartcard that allowed beneficiaries to purchase approved food in approved shops. The government henceforth referred to programmes providing food coupons as ‘near-cash’ transfer programmes.

The government remained torn between its formal commitment to providing a thorough safety net and anxiety about expanding it too far and too fast. This tension was evident in the government's adoption of a National Strategy for Poverty Reduction (NSPR) in 2003. Because the Botswana economy had grown rapidly, Botswana was not eligible for debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) programme, and was therefore not obliged to prepare the standard Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers required of HIPC countries. The NSPR, finalized in 2003, was Botswana's substitute for a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. The NSPR identified "cost-effective, pro-poor social safety nets" as one of its "strategic pathways for poverty reduction" (which included also broad-based growth, improved access to basic quality education, healthcare and nutrition for the poor, a better response to HIV/AIDS and decentralised planning). In practice, however, none of the 16 programmes identified in the NSPR entailed any obvious strengthening of safety nets.³⁹

The tension between expanding the safety net and the BDP government's conservative instincts was especially evident with respect to provision for children. South Africa provided an obvious, well-known comparison. The South African government introduced in 1998 a Child Support Grant that paid cash benefits that were modest in relation to other South African grants, subject to a means test, and initially only for children to the age of seven. The means test was set at quite a high-income level, however, and the age threshold was raised repeatedly, eventually to the age of eighteen. Even though the South African government resisted proposals for a more rapid expansion, the cost of the programme rose from less than 0.2 percent of GDP at the outset to 1.2 percent of GDP by 2009 (Seekings, 2016c). In Botswana, provision for orphans was expanded in the mid-2000s, in part because of a recognition that the expansion of state capacity agreed in 1999 had not solve the problem of under-registration of orphans: In 2005, only 34 percent of orphans were thought to be registered; the government set itself the target of 100 percent registration by 2010.⁴⁰ The cost of the OCP did rise to 0.2 percent of GDP

³⁹ What the NSPR did initiate was a higher level of coordination within the state. The implementation of the NSPR would be overseen by the Rural Development Council, supported by a Multi-Sectoral Committee for Food Security and Poverty Reduction (MFSPR) and the Secretariat in the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning. The MFSPR comprised the relevant government ministries together with the private sector, non-governmental organisations and community-based organisations. The MFSPR 'decided to promote inclusive growth by mainstreaming poverty reduction into the national development plan' (Koketso, 2012).

⁴⁰ 'Orphans and vulnerable children', available on:

[http://www.gov.bw/Global/NACA%20Ministry/Orphans%20and%20Vulnerable%20Children%20\(OVC\).pdf](http://www.gov.bw/Global/NACA%20Ministry/Orphans%20and%20Vulnerable%20Children%20(OVC).pdf).

by 2012/13 (BIDPA and World Bank, 2013) – a fraction of the cost of the South African Child Support Grant – and much or all of this was funded until 2013 from abroad, through the (US) President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).⁴¹ If the costs of the school and vulnerable group feeding programmes are added, the total cost of support for children and mothers in Botswana came to only 0.7 percent of GDP in 2012/13 (*ibid*) – i.e. approximately one half of the total share of GDP spent on child-oriented social assistance in South Africa.⁴²

When, in 2010, a team of consultants (from the UK and Botswana) proposed a broader child grant along South African lines, costing approximately the same as the South African CSG (i.e. about 1.2 percent of GDP), the government of Botswana demurred. The plan was reportedly supported by bureaucrats in the Ministry of Local Government but was shot down by politicians on the grounds that it would encourage dependency and laziness.⁴³ In 2013, the World Bank (together with BIDPA) proposed replacing the existing Destitute and Orphan Care Programmes with a new means-tested Family Support Grant (FSG). The FSG would pay a cash benefit of P85 per capita per month (equivalent to P340 for an average family of four) to all families living in absolute poverty who were not reached by other programmes. The World Bank and BIDPA proposed three options: A budget-neutral one, costing no more than the programmes being replaced (i.e. just under 0.5 percent of GDP), but with limited coverage (24 percent of the population); an expanded programme reaching more poor people (32 percent of the population) at a cost of an additional 0.2 percent of GDP; and a supplementary programme which would not replace existing programmes but would reach any very poor households not benefitting from the existing programmes, at an additional cost of 0.35 percent of GDP (BIDPA & World Bank, 2013: 73-6). The government of Botswana was apparently not persuaded.

One programme that did see significant reform – or at least repackaging – was workfare. Another review of Destitute Policy, in August 2008 recommended (again) that able-bodied ‘destitutes’ should be enrolled in workfare.⁴⁴ This required that the workfare programme be extended to all parts of the country where there were (able-bodied) destitutes and at all times (not only during drought). The former Labour-Intensive Public Works programme was renamed the *Ipelegeng*

⁴¹ I am grateful to Isaac Chinyoka for this information.

⁴² In addition to the CSG, South Africa paid grants to foster-parents who had adopted children and to the caregivers for disabled children.

⁴³ I am grateful to Isaac Chinyoka for this information.

⁴⁴ See 2010 budget speech.

programme, became permanent rather than intermittent, and poverty rather than drought-focused, from 2008/09.

The government seems to have contemplated but had neither the courage nor conviction to reel in the welfare state. School fees were reintroduced in 2006 but two years later, in 2008, the poor were exempted. A review of Botswana's social welfare programmes in 2007 warned that further increases in expenditure were not sustainable and recommended more targeting (Seleka *et al.*, 2007), but the government rejected the introduction of means tests for old-age pensions and orphan benefits.⁴⁵ The 2008 review of destitute relief led to the transfer of some beneficiaries from one programme to another (workfare). In 2009, the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning together with the World Bank conducted a public expenditure review that covered, *inter alia*, 'social protection' or welfare programmes. In his 2010 budget speech, the Minister of Finance warned that the number of people receiving assistance was 'economically unsustainable', pointing to the 180,000 registered old-age pensioners, destitutes and orphans.⁴⁶

As of 2009/10, Botswana's various social assistance programmes were costing a total of about 1.9 percent of GDP, with a slight decline in the relative cost thereafter. The old-age pensions, OCP, destitute relief (including for 'needy' children and students), primary school feeding programme and secondary school feeding programme all cost much the same, at about 0.2 percent of GDP each. *Ipelegeng*, once it was up and running, cost a little more. The Vulnerable Groups Feeding Programme cost a little less, and did not operate every year (BIDPA & World Bank, 2013: 42). Total expenditure on social assistance programmes was smaller (in relation to GDP) than in South Africa, but was high compared to most African countries.⁴⁷ The BIDPA report that provided these data continued to report criticisms of several programmes as being either too generous or poorly targeted or both (*ibid*: 59-62). BIDPA recommended reducing the wages paid to *Ipelegeng* workers by one-third so as to ensure that only the very poor participated (*ibid*: 79).

⁴⁵ See the 2007 budget speech.

⁴⁶ 2010 budget speech (presented by O.K. Matambo, Monday 8th Feb 2010, *Hansard* vol 163 part I.

⁴⁷ BIDPA's reported total for 'safety net' expenditure included also expenditure on scholarships, and then compared this inflated total with totals from other countries that excluded comparable public expenditure on education (2013: 32). This is misleading.

5. Economic growth and change: Affordability and need

The institutionalization of the welfare state in Botswana was possible because of rapid economic growth and was necessary not only because the benefits of growth were not shared across the whole population but also because economic growth fuelled social change. Economic growth in Botswana was exceptional within Africa. GDP grew in real terms (i.e. taking inflation into account) by an average of 11 percent p.a. between independence and 1976, by 7 percent p.a. in the second decade after independence, and by 5 percent p.a. between 1987 and 1996 and again between 1997 and 2006. Although the economy was briefly stagnant in the early 1990s, the first time it actually shrank significantly was in 2008-09, when the international economic crisis caused a collapse in diamond revenues. By 2008, GDP per capita rose was fourteen times higher in real terms than it had been at independence. Rapid economic growth drove social change also. The combination of an arid, drought-prone environment and this rapid economic growth ensured that Tswana society underwent de-agrarianisation faster and more profoundly than most of Africa. Welfare state-building in Africa was generally a response to de-agrarianisation rather than industrialization. Conditions in Botswana made it likely that the country would build a welfare state faster and further than its neighbours to the north.

Table 1: Income Poverty and Inequality in Botswana

		1985/86	1993/94	2002/03	2009/10
Poverty headcount (%)	US\$3.10/day (2011 PPP)	63	55	49	36
	US\$1.90/day (2011 PPP)	43	35	30	18
	National poverty line	59	33*	31	19
Poverty gap (%)	US\$3.10/day (2011 PPP)	32	26	23	14
	US\$1.90/day (2011 PPP)	18	13	11	6
Income distribution (Gini coefficient)		0.54	0.61	0.65	0.60

Source: World Development Indicators.

PPP: purchasing power parity (i.e. adjusted for differences in the cost of living).

* Botswana (2013) provides the higher figure of 47 percent, which is more consistent with the trend in the other series.

This exceptional economic growth reduced but did not eliminate poverty. Table 1 summarises World Bank data (updated in 2016) calculated from household surveys on the poverty headcount rate (i.e. the proportion of the population with incomes below one or other poverty line) and the poverty gap (i.e. the proportion of GDP required to raise the incomes of all households with incomes below one or other poverty line up to that poverty line, i.e. to eliminate poverty). As late as the mid-1980s, 59 percent of the population was considered ‘poor’ according to the government’s preferred poverty line. Poverty and ultra-poverty rates fell steadily through the 1990s and 2000s. Nonetheless, one-fifth of the population remained poor in 2009/10. The poverty gap also declined, especially during the late 1990s and early 2000s. These trends were due to the combination of rapid economic growth and the expansion of social assistance programmes, most of which were well-targeted on the poor (Valentine, 1993; BIDPA & World Bank, 2013: 52-3). Poverty persisted because the welfare state failed to cover all poor people (i.e. it had ‘exclusion errors’). Even in 2009/10, the poverty gap remained large (at 6 or 14 percent, depending on the poverty line) in relation to the resources spent on safety net programmes (at less than 2 percent of GDP).

The government of Botswana repeatedly expressed concern over the affordability of its welfare programmes. The total cost of its social assistance programmes, at less than 2 percent of GDP, is much less than in South Africa or Mauritius but more than in most African countries (as we noted above). Botswana has come to spend a significant share of GDP (and, in the 2000s and 2010s, of government revenues) despite the generally conservative attitude of its governments. Public finances in Botswana are not transparent. The World Bank does not report long time series for Botswana as it does for most other comparable countries. It appears, however, that the *fiscal* expansion of the welfare state in Botswana entailed three major phases, as discussed above.

The first phase entailed the provision of relief in the face of devastating drought, and then to facilitate post-drought recovery, first in the mid- and late 1960s, next in 1979-80, then through most of the 1980s, and again in the early 1990s. Faced with the prospect of famine and the devastation of cattle herds at independence, the BDP government had little choice but to organize a major drought relief and recovery operation. This was made very easy by the availability of large volumes of free food (and even stockfeed) through the WFP, as well as budgetary support from the UK (and, later, elsewhere also). The estimated cost of these antecedents of

Botswana's welfare state was more than 1 percent of GDP, but most of the bill was picked up by the WFP and the British Government, rather than by the government or people of Botswana.⁴⁸

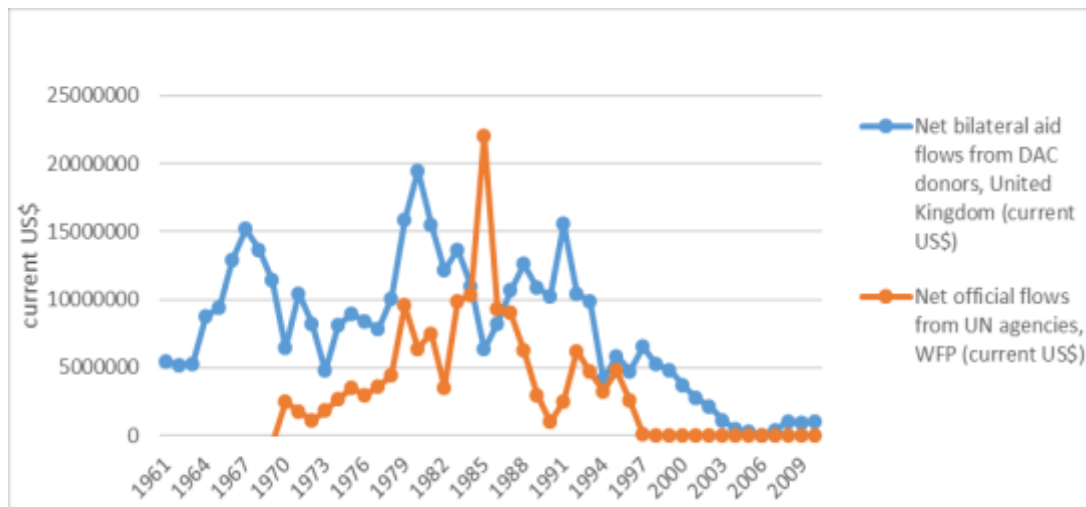


Figure 1: British and WFP aid to Botswana.

During this phase the government did have to make occasional decisions about its financial commitments. In the mid-1980s drought, although the country received massive food aid (see Figure 1), the government assumed most of the non-food costs of the relief and recovery programme. In 1984, Botswana received about P31 million in food aid (mostly from the WFP). In the 1984/85 financial year, it budgeted P40 million for relief from its development budget, but spent only about P27 million, most of which reportedly came from domestic revenues (Holm and Morgan, 1985: 476). The total cost came to about 3 percent of GDP, divided equally between donors and the government of Botswana. Outside of droughts, the government incurred costs in running feeding programmes (although the food itself came from abroad) and for destitute relief, but the latter at least was very inexpensive. Destitute relief served, like the poor laws in nineteenth century Europe, to mitigate extreme poverty, but the government looked primarily to economic growth and other programmes (notably ARAP and other programmes to strengthen food production among small farmers) to reduce poverty.

In the second half of the 1990s, the subsidization of the welfare state through the WFP and British development aid finally dried up. Figure 1 shows the reported value of WFP and British aid, in current prices (i.e. without taking inflation into

⁴⁸ Aid financed other development programmes also. Swedish and Norwegian funds paid for much of the ARDP in the mid-1970s, for example.

account). Even in current prices, the value of WFP and British assistance declined from the mid-1980s. Both rose briefly in the early 1990s during the drought, then declined again, with WFP assistance terminating in 1997. Some foreign aid continued – including through PEPFAR, which funded Botswana's Orphan and Child Programme until 2013. This framed the second phase in the fiscal expansion of the welfare state, during which the government of Botswana assumed financial responsibility for programmes supported hitherto by the WFP (especially the feeding programmes) and introduced new programmes (such as the old age pension) even though the cost was charged to the government itself.

Both of these reforms entailed significant additional financial commitments. Firstly, the new old-age pensions cost almost P100 million, or 0.5 percent of GDP, in 1997-98. The cost in relation to GDP declined subsequently, to about 0.2 percent, because the real value of the pension was not increased whilst the GDP continued to grow. It is likely that the government anticipated this when it decided to introduce the pensions. Secondly, the government assumed full responsibility for the feeding programmes. Outside of drought (and drought recovery) years, the cost of feeding programmes was modest. In 1997/98, the government spent only P42 million or 0.2 percent of GDP, although expenditure rose subsequently to about 0.5 percent of GDP during the drought of the early 2000s. Although the government's detailed financial projections do not seem to be public, the government probably anticipated that these two reforms would cost it close to 1 percent of GDP. This level of expenditure would have been a massive outlay for many African countries, but for Botswana it was less than the government was spending on drought relief and recovery much of the time.

At the time the government anticipated that public finances would remain healthy. Former Deputy-Minister of Finance and long-time cabinet member David Magang later accused Masire of profligacy as minister, throwing money away (2008: 475). The 8th NDP (1997/98-2002/03) forecast budget surpluses, with rising revenues outpacing the rising expenditure. But it acknowledged that the combination of slower-than-forecast economic growth and unrestrained public expenditure would result in budget deficits (and slower growth) (Botswana, 1997a: 69-71). It turned out that economic growth was better than expected but public expenditure rose so fast that the government did incur budget deficits. The deficit in 1998/99 was P1.4 billion, or more than 6 percent of GDP. This was the first budget deficit since 1982/83 (when the deficit had been about 2 percent of GDP). Deficits recurred also in 2001/02 and 2002/03, as expenditure continued to rise whilst revenues in fact declined (Botswana, 2003: 35-39). Increased domestic funding of welfare

programmes in the late 1990s contributed to these budget deficits, although rising expenditure was driven primarily by the public sector wage bill.

In the 2000s, in the third phase of welfare state-building, the government agreed to a series of mostly parametric reforms that raised the total costs of its social assistance programmes to close to 2 percent of GDP. The value of food baskets was raised, and workfare was expanded. But the government rejected proposals in 2010 and 2013 for one very expensive reform – the Child Support Grant, with a price tag of 1.2 percent of GDP – and one less-expensive one – the Family Support Grant, costing up to 0.35 percent of GDP. This was a period of renewed anxiety over the cost of welfare programmes. Public finances had recovered in the early 2000s after the unprecedented budget deficit of 1998/99. The global economic crisis of 2008-09 caused commodity prices to crash, however, which meant that the government of Botswana's revenues from mining collapsed. The 10th NDP (2009-16) budgeted for deficits, and warned that it would be difficult to maintain safety nets (Botswana, 2009: 46). The need for fiscal caution was restated in 2013 in the mid-term review of the 10th NDP (Botswana, 2013b).⁴⁹

Economic growth generated the tax revenues that funded expanding public programmes. Economic growth also fueled social and economic changes that contributed to a perceived need for such programmes. Urbanisation was the most obvious trend. The urban population grew from less than 10 percent of the national population in 1971 to 57 percent in 2006 (Botswana, 1997a: 13; 2009: 20). Poverty, however, remained highest in rural areas, and was concentrated among households and individuals who lacked skills, had insufficient access to land and cattle to farm, and were without kin to support them. A rising proportion of rural households had no cattle, little or no land, and weak or no kin or other networks through which they could claim support. Poverty was thus the result of de-agrarianisation rather than urbanization.

As early as 1977/78, a year of reasonable rain and production, one survey found that only 7 percent of households were able to meet their food needs through their own production. Almost all households were dependent on other sources of food, especially income from waged work, whether as migrants in neighbouring South Africa (in the mid-twentieth century) or within Botswana itself (in the later part of the century) (Vierich & Sheppard, 1980: 50). The simplest measure of de-

⁴⁹ Isaac Chinyoka tells me that the anxiety over the sustainability of social assistance is rooted in the fear that diamonds are *not* forever. This point is also made by Ian Khama in an interview by Greg Mills, *Daily Maverick*, 29th June 2016.

agrarianisation in Botswana is the declining proportion of households, including of households in rural areas only, who had access to cattle, whether through ownership or some kind of lease arrangement (including *mafisa*). In the early 1980s, over half the national herd was owned by the top 7 percent of owners, i.e. owners of more than 100 cattle each, whilst 45 percent of rural households owned no cattle (Botswana, 1985 NDP6: 20). In the 'traditional' agricultural sector, i.e. excluding the 507 commercial farms, 32 percent of farming households had no cattle in 1981. By 1995, this proportion had risen to 49 percent (Botswana, 1997a: 227-8). The poorest households had least in the way of a buffer against drought: either they had no cattle to sell, or if they did sell their last cattle, they would have no way of ploughing when the rains did arrive (Vierich & Sheppard, 1980: 54).

A social aspect of de-agrarianisation was the shrinkage of kinship obligations. The official narrative of Tswana culture emphasizes the extended family. In 1970, for example, then Vice-President Masire praised the "African extended family ... with its built-in system of social security" as 'an invaluable institution'. He warned that, "if the extended family system were to disintegrate we would all be the losers". He continued to laud "the traditional system of sharing natural resources of water and grazing, and land generally" for providing "a sound basis on which to build a just and egalitarian society".⁵⁰

Contemporary ethnographic studies reported that the extended family system was indeed threatened by a rise in individualism and decline in perceived obligations towards kin, including even parents. Kooijman, who conducted research in the early 1970s, reported a decline in the former practice of young men ploughing for their parents. She illustrates this with a discussion of one poor family, whose kin were not prepared to support them except in return for work. A wealthy kinsman told Kooijman that "I cannot give him food without him or his family working for us. My wife could never agree to a free gift of corn. She would ask me what I am doing by giving food to 'lazy' people". Perhaps in part in consequence, poor people were often ashamed to ask for help (Kooijman, 1978: 234-5). Kooijman also reported changes in attitudes towards communal labour. Young men were unwilling to work unpaid. Historically, chiefs had instructed young men to join communal work parties without remuneration. The BDP's challenge to the authority of the chiefs may have contributed to a general hostility towards unpaid labour. Kooijman found that young men (and women) would work for food provided through drought relief operations, but they would not work for nothing after the programme ended (1978: 234-6). Writing in the late 1970s, Colclough and

⁵⁰ In *Development in Botswana*, quoted in Kooijman (1978), p.212.

McCarthy summarized that “it is generally believed that [the] traditional methods of security [against drought] are now breaking down”; chiefs no longer organized tribal stores of food, the expansion of cattle grazing had pushed away the wildlife herds that had previously been hunted in times of drought, rising numbers of households had no cattle, which meant they had nothing to sell during drought, and the *mafisa* (or cattle loan) system was in decline (1980: 111-14).

Powerful players within the state actively opposed measures that they thought might contribute to the erosion of the extended family. In 1981, Seretse Khama’s widow Ruth championed a proposal to establish a facility for homeless children in Gaborone, funded entirely through a global NGO (SOS Children’s Villages) and run by Botswana as a community-like ‘village’. The permanent secretaries of several government departments opposed the proposal on the grounds that it “would accelerate the disintegration of the extended family”. These opponents insisted on repairing not further undermining the ‘customary welfare system’ of the extended family. Lady Khama protested vigorously in a letter to the President’s Office, and seems to have shifted the government’s view.⁵¹

Increasingly, government officials recognized that the extended family system was disintegrating. The 7th NDP acknowledged that the traditional extended family system was breaking down (Botswana, 1991: 18). This recognition facilitated the expansion of public provision. Evidence on social change was presented at the 1993 workshop on the elderly (discussed above). In the parliamentary debate on the old-age pension in 1996, the opposition (BNF) MP (for Kanye), Mr S. Gabathswane, recalled that

‘before independence, the sense of communal obligation was very strong as the care of the aged, orphans and the disabled was voluntarily undertaken by relatives under the system of extended family. Now, today, as you are all aware, that sense has now died. What remains is the sense of everybody for himself and God for us all’.⁵²

Rising public responsibility for poverty was thus facilitated by the tax revenues generated by economic growth at the same time as it was seen to have become necessary on account of the social and economic changes accompanying economic growth (on top of the emergency of drought relief and recovery). There was no inevitability, however, about rising public provision for the poor. Other

⁵¹ Botswana National Archives (BNA), file OP 28/6, ‘Social welfare’.

⁵² *Hansard*, Thursday 15th Feb 1996, p 95.

governments might have responded in different ways. The opposition parties in Botswana repeatedly promised more generous public programmes, although whether they would have delivered on these promises is unknowable. Some other governments elsewhere in Africa did not expand public provision in the same way as Botswana, even taking into account their more limited revenues. To understand the development of public policy in Botswana, we must turn to the character of the leadership of the governing BDP.

6. Tswana culture and BDP ideology

The official narrative of Tswana culture places a very heavy emphasis on tradition, more explicitly than most other national cultures in East and Southern Africa. According to this narrative, chiefs had clear responsibilities for the poor. In the case of the Batawana, when the chief (*kgosi*) was installed, he was told:

*‘Morafe wa gago ke oo
O babalele
Ke wena ramasiela, ke wena rabahumanegi
Kgosi ke kgosi ka batho.’*

Translated: There is our nation, care for it, you are the father of the orphans and the poor, the king is the king by the grace of the people (Tlou, 1998). Whatever the veracity of this tradition of responsibility, it was appropriated by the BDP which dominated the transition to independence and has governed Botswana without interruption since.

BDP ideology

The BDP was a ‘grand coalition’ of modernizing, educated cattle-owners (Samatar, 1999; Sebudubudu with Molutsi, 2009). It was led by a traditional leader (Seretse Khama, who had effectively been deposed as chief of the BaNgwato by the British after marrying a British woman) who was also an example of the highly educated ‘new men’ who became commercial cattle farmers and embraced liberal democracy (Parson, 1981; Parsons, 1988; Tlou *et al.*, 1995). Quett Masire, who was Khama’s deputy within both the party and government and his successor as president in 1980, was the son of a minor headman, a former teacher and school principal, who also became a major commercial cattle rancher.

The BDP was not a broad-based nationalist movement, nor was it led by a natural ideologue (such as Nyerere, in Tanzania, or some of the leaders of rival political parties in Botswana). Formed to negotiate independence, and having won an overwhelming majority in the pre-independence elections, the BDP had to define an ideology setting out the relationships between the new (BDP-run) state and its citizens. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Khama, Masire and the BDP, with the assistance of their mostly expatriate scriptwriters, crafted conservative doctrines of government, growth and welfare. These doctrines were shaped profoundly by two factors: the drought and ensuing destitution and poverty that accompanied independence and the government's determination to transfer powers from the chiefs to the new state. With respect to welfare specifically, the result was a doctrine with four key elements:

- The idealization of rural society, wariness of social change and distaste for urban life.⁵³
- The imperative of 'self-help' and hostility to 'dependency' on the charity of the state.
- The goal of social harmony despite inequality.
- The sharing of responsibility between individuals and the state.

Khama and the BDP identified four 'fundamental principles' that would guide 'National Development'. Each of these was said to be rooted in Tswana tradition: Democracy (*puso ya batho ka batho*), development (*ditiro tsa ditlabalolo*), unity (*popagano ya sechaba*) and self-reliance (*ipelegeng* or *boipelego*) (BDP, 1969; Khama, 1969). These were united in the Tswana concept of *kagisano*, which was usually translated as 'unity, peace, harmony and a sense of community' (Khama, 1972; see Gulbrandsen, 2012; Seekings, 2016b). Whilst the BDP sought to appropriate tradition, its leaders were not traditionalists. They did not, for example, promote traditional clothing or rituals (Gulbrandsen, 2012: 192).

BDP leaders were liberal in their preference for markets over the state, were conservative on many social issues (including both the family and sex, which became important in the mid-1990s when Masire opposed many interventions to

⁵³ 'We in the BDP were also concerned about the drift to towns for social reasons. In the rural areas, people had a traditional way of making a living and carrying on with their lives. In the cities, they either got a job or they just become lost souls. The traditional safety nets – going to live at your uncle's place, or borrowing oxen from someone else to plough your lands if you had no oxen – had no parallel in the towns. We talked about it in cabinet; we talked about it in party meetings; and we talked about it in parliamentary caucuses. It was very much a part of our thinking as we developed our economic policies.' (Masire, 2006: 217)

contain AIDS (see Masire, 2006)), but saw the state and society as having responsibilities for the poor. These responsibilities were shared with the poor themselves: The poor had a responsibility to work hard and take advantage of whatever opportunities were open to them; they should not rely on government ‘handouts’. Improved productivity was always to be preferred to welfare. In its 1973 National Policy for Rural Development, for instance, the government declared its support for “a subsidy and credit programme” but “with the qualification that credit and subsidies will be for the purpose of increasing productivity and not in the form of social welfare handouts” (quoted in Devereux, 2007: 553). Khama and Masire were insistent that theirs was not a socialist ideology (Khama, 1970; Masire, 1989, 1994, 2006).⁵⁴

Conservative BDP presidents and ministers did employ progressive, expatriate technocrats. They, and the foreign aid agencies, pushed “many of the more clearly redistributive policies”, including “the incomes policy, the attempt at progressive taxation, [and] the avoidance of urban subsidies”. But, assessed young, expatriate technocrats Colclough and MacCarthy, “expatriate or donor-inspired redistributive policies” often lacked ‘political impetus’ and were “applied only half-heartedly and with limited effect” (1980: 244). Expatriates shaped rather than transformed BDP leaders’ ideological beliefs (see Seekings, 2016b).⁵⁵

At the end of Masire’s presidency, the BDP’s ideology was rearticulated in *Vision 2016*. *Vision 2016* was initially drafted by a 9-person ‘presidential task team’ appointed (by Masire) in August 1996, then revised by an expanded group, after public consultations, and completed in 1997.⁵⁶ *Vision 2016* started by asking what kind of society Botswana should be in 2016, i.e. fifty years after independence. The answer was: educated, prosperous and just, as well as secure, democratic, moral and ‘united and proud’. *Vision 2016* invoked the four ‘national principles’ underpinning the country’s development plans, i.e. democracy, development, self-reliance and unity. It then added a fifth principle: the Tswana concept of ‘*botho*’.

‘This refers to one of the tenets of African culture – the concept of a person who has a well-rounded character, who is well-mannered, courteous and disciplined, and realises his or her potential both as an individual and as a part of the community to which he or she belongs.

⁵⁴ See also the BDP’s election manifestos in 1989 and 1994.

⁵⁵ Samatar (1999: 87-8) credits expatriate bureaucrats with more influence.

⁵⁶ The members of the Task Team were listed on page 82. Opposition leaders were initially involved, but later withdrew (Masire, 2007: 144).

“*Botho*” defines a process for earning respect by first giving it, and to gain empowerment by empowering others. It encourages people to applaud rather than resent those who succeed. It disapproves of antisocial, disgraceful, inhuman and criminal behaviour, and encourages social justice for all. “*Botho*” as a concept must stretch to its utmost limits the largeness of the spirit of all Batswana. It must permeate every aspect of our lives, like the air we breathe, so that no Motswana will rest easy knowing that another is in need’ (Botswana, 1997b: 2).

Together, these five principles should promote ‘social harmony’ (*kagisano*).

There was a clear, implicit commitment to social justice. *Vision 2016* spelt out that Botswana would be (by 2016) “a compassionate and caring society, offering support and opportunity to those who are poor, and including *all* people in the benefits of growth” (Botswana, 1997b: 8, emphasis in original). Poverty would be halved by 2007, and absolute poverty would be eliminated by 2016. This would be achieved primarily through economic growth. By 2016, “Botswana will have succeeded in helping people to escape from the poverty trap”. But,

‘there will be a social safety net for those who find themselves in poverty for any reason. ... There will always be those who fall into poverty as a result of misfortune. The challenge to Botswana is to provide an adequate and dignified safety net for those who are in poverty in a way that does not encourage dependency and provides a means of escape from the poverty trap and a return to productive society’ (*ibid*: 9, 24).

At the same time, Botswana should worry about the “deterioration of national values”. In a section on the ‘give me’ attitude, *Vision 2016* insisted on the importance of avoiding “a culture of dependency” (Botswana, 1997b: 25). Poverty reduction required firstly job creation, then education and basic social services. Yes, “Botswana must establish an effective social safety net”, but this was “to support those who are genuinely unable to obtain a minimum standard of living through their own efforts, and to assist and encourage them to become self-reliant again”. The safety net would focus on “vulnerable groups such as the elderly, disabled, orphans and terminally ill”, and would be provided “in partnership with the private sector and NGOs” (*ibid*: 9). For poor working-age adults, the government’s labour-intensive employment programmes would serve as “an employer of last resort” (*ibid*: 50).

Under Festus Mogae, a professional economist who became Vice-President and Minister of Finance and Development Planning before succeeding Masire as President in 1998, even heavier emphasis was placed on the importance of a balance between public and individual responsibilities. He affirmed repeatedly his commitment to tackling the challenges of poverty and unemployment (Mogae, 1999, 2004),⁵⁷ but saw this in terms of “mutual social responsibility”. “National development”, he explained in his budget speech in 1993, was “a cooperative endeavour, and we must all play our part”. Mutual self-responsibility meant “that self-reliance takes precedence over appeals to Government for assistance. Pride in self-reliance must be nurtured; it cannot be allowed to be displaced by a dependency syndrome”. The massive expansion of public expenditure that had been made possible primarily by mining revenues had encouraged the belief that “assistance from Government is somehow costless to society”. This attitude had to “be reversed”, with citizens recognizing that “even the provision of basic needs, to which Government is committed, implied a cost that falls on those who pay taxes or on those who forego other service that might have been provided with equivalent funds”.⁵⁸ In the first BDP election manifesto under his leadership, Mogae called for “self-reliance as opposed to a dependency syndrome” (Mogae, 1999).

Mogae emphasized also the importance of fiscal responsibility. “We are all aware that resources are scarce and have alternative or competing uses”, he lectured parliament in 1996; “devoting more resources in one area will usually involve withdrawing some resources from another area. The essence of the economic policy making is therefore trying to make the ‘right’ choices or strike the right balance”. In the face of trade-offs, he said, the government sometimes has to make unpopular decisions.⁵⁹ He returned to this theme in his final presidential State of the Nation address to parliament in 2007:

‘I leave with no tormented conscience. As President, I placed the welfare of all Batswana at the centre of everything I did. Prudence, transparency, and the honest use of natural resources for your benefit have been my guiding principles. I have not allowed political expediency and populism to cloud my judgement and service to the nation. The road to populism may be lined with cheering clouds; but, in the end we cannot escape the cold hard facts of our limitations as a developing country. I have ensured that our nation does not live beyond its means: I will not leave you or our

⁵⁷ See his speeches in 1999 and again in 2004, after he was being sworn in after the elections.

⁵⁸ *Hansard*, vol.110, part 1, Monday 8th Feb 1993, p4. See also the BDP’s 1994 election manifesto.

⁵⁹ Mogae, budget speech, *Hansard*, Monday 12th Feb 1996, pp.4-23.

children groaning under the yoke of intolerable debt and despair’ (reproduced in Grant, 2012: 84).

Mogae assumed the presidency just when the government began to experience fiscal difficulties, and his speeches reflected the imperative of austerity. But they were rooted in doctrines articulated under his predecessors Khama and Masire.

Vision 2016 and other government documents were supposedly national documents, but they were produced under the close supervision of the governing BDP. To what extent did they reflect a national culture and not only the ideology of the dominant party? Some scholars have emphasized enduring continuities in ‘Tswana culture’ from pre- to post-colonial periods (and further that this culture was ‘unique’, explaining post-colonial Botswana’s political and economic successes). By culture, however, Hjort (2010) refers to the legitimacy of centralized but hierarchical polities (in large part due to the colonial institutionalization of indirect rule with distinctive checks and balances through popular accountability), a culture of consultation and consensus-building, and the importance attached to private property and commerce. He does point to two aspects of Tswana culture which might be pertinent to social protection: the legitimacy of taxes levied and spent on things like infrastructure, and an inclusive political culture. Hjort does not argue that Tswana culture and society made possible a distinctive social contract between citizens and the state, but this is the obvious implication of his analysis.

In some respects, the BDP ideology seems to be at odds with the reality of contemporary society, but it is unclear whether it is at odds with predominant values. For example, the BDP’s strong emphasis on the family and kinship seems nostalgic in the light of evidence of limited support by Batswana for poor kin. The BDP’s stress on ‘unity’ is at odds with a widespread lack of empathy towards non-kin, especially poor members of the non-Tswana minorities who are widely viewed as serfs and believed not to need or want modern lifestyles (Bar-On, 2001; Good, 1993, 1999a; Saugestad, 2001; Gulbrandsen, 2012).⁶⁰ The BDP elite’s distaste for urban society was incongruent with the reality of urbanization.

⁶⁰ When, in 2004, President Mogae visited the New Xade camp for San forcibly removed from the central Kalahari Park, to distribute food, clothing and blankets, he reportedly told them: ‘I am your father and I have come to check up on my children’ (<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=h-genocide&month=0406&week=d&msg=ou9VVouJWRyEvhJrCZmDng&user=&pw=>).

The spectre of dependency

For welfare policy, the issue of ‘dependency’ was especially important. The BDP leadership was resolute in its hostility to dependency (on ‘handouts’).⁶¹ The evidence on attitudes towards dependency in Tswana society generally seems mixed. Bar-On suggests that the Batswana did not stigmatise dependency:

‘[U]nlike most industrialized societies, Tswana society does not pathologize the poor. For one, with a narrow formal employment base, relatively few people have regular incomes and so many people depend on their relatives for much of their income. Consequently, there is little, if any, stigma in dependency. For example, many women regard it as “natural” to be supported by men and get married mainly to support their children and themselves. Also because no stigma attaches to dependency, there is no “culture of poverty” ideology that holds the poor responsible for their plight or castigates them for reproducing practices and values that mainstream society condemns’ (Bar-On, 2001: 264).

Yet Gulbrandsen, who conducted his original research in the late 1970s, reports that “in private conversations politicians and bureaucrats consistently emphasized the danger of providing too many direct subsidies for the poor people, these being, in their view, likely to encourage laziness”, which also raised the cost of farm labour. Such views “never surface in public where it is constantly argued that the interests of rich and poor are not competing” (1996: 367, fn 2). Presidents Khama and Masire repeatedly criticized ‘handouts’ and advocated ‘self-reliance’, although neither seem to have used the term ‘dependency’ in their speeches in the 1970s (Seekings, 2016b). The first use of the term that I can find date from around 1980, in assessments of government drought relief policies. Vierich & Sheppard attribute the government’s slow response to the 1978-79 drought to an anxiety about dependency:

‘Government’s position seems to be that, at least to begin with, household response is likely to be adequate, and that for famine relief to be provided at this early stage would discourage some households from trying to help themselves, and so create a “welfare dependency”’ (1980: 68).

⁶¹ See also Makgala (2013) on discourses of laziness.

Gooch & Macdonald similarly reported that the government's tardiness had been due to its failure to decide on how to provide relief to people who were rendered destitute by the drought itself (1981: 13). They found that the ensuing, somewhat ad hoc 1979/80 drought relief programme had indeed 'revealed that free food distribution encouraged a sense of dependency, was damaging to individual self-respect and human dignity, and possibly contributed to reduced agricultural production' (*ibid*: 120). Their proposed solution was to base drought relief on workfare programmes that paid such a low wage that only the desperate would take the work: A daily wage of 1 Pula "was low enough to discourage those who had alternative means of support from coming forward, while enabling those affected by the drought to survive" (*ibid*: 126). Gooch & Macdonald's proposals entailed a criticism of the 1980 National Destitutes Policy, which made explicit provision for support for able-bodied adults who had been made destitute by "natural disaster or temporary hardship".

The spectre of dependency appeared in BDP and government documents from the mid-1980s (see, for example, the 6th NDP, in 1985 – Botswana, 1985: 20-21, quoted above) and especially the 1990s (see, for example, the 7th NDP – Botswana, 1991: 33, 385, 389). Former BDP Minister David Magang (whose offices included Deputy-Minister of Finance and Development Planning in 1984-85 and 1992-94) writes that the culture of dependency and entitlement only emerged after Khama's death, but then became widespread (Magang, 2008: 402, 470). By the 2000s, the idea of a 'culture of dependency' was widely articulated. Magang himself articulated a general critique of dependency and entitlement in Botswana:

'In today's Botswana, the culture of dependence, as opposed to one of self-resourcefulness, is omnipresent and the blame lies squarely with government. Instead of encouraging its citizens to stand on their own two feet, government has tended to spoon-feed and at times force-feed them. It has created a haven of handouts from which it is well-nigh impossible to wean them... There are just too many free or easy-to-acquire things in Botswana and, for a country that is of limited endowment, this amounts to profligacy. Batswana are so used to giveaways that they cannot nurture a sustained entrepreneurial spirit; whatever business undertaking they indulge in has to be underwritten, directly or indirectly, by government' (*ibid*: 402, 509).

Magang was especially critical of the support that the state gave to small farmers:

‘With each programme government begged people to be what they were not interested in being, in a manner akin to squeezing water from a rock. Government practically designated any Motswana who came forward as a potential farmer, de-bushed land on his behalf, provided him with agricultural inputs and implements, complete with hired tractors, and employed people to weed his cultivation, whom it paid in his stead. At some stage, the weeders’ subsidy was withdrawn, following a wave of public outrage, and the farmers simply downed tools; they would not weed their own fields! Foreign economic analysts once noted that in some years, overall GDP went up not because of increased production, but owing to the huge sums government spent to prop up failing or reluctant farmers’ (*ibid*).

In Magang’s view, what was needed was education and training, not handouts.

The 2005 *Botswana Human Development Report* reported in a section titled ‘The Trap of State Provision’ that an earlier “2002 review of anti-poverty initiatives in Botswana” had found that “stakeholders... cited ‘welfare policies that promote a culture of dependency’ among the causes of poverty in Botswana”. Referring to drought relief and the Accelerated Rural Development Programme (ARDP), the 2002 report apparently found that “poor people were unanimous in their view of drought relief as a useful programme” but “many of the relatively well-off respondents, including civil servants, expressed concern” over the possibility that policies might exacerbate or cause poverty (UNDP, 2005: 18). The UNDP Report concluded, more strongly than the Botswana government itself, that “the Government’s strategies for expanding access to essential services, expanding opportunities for investment and employment, and ensuring minimum welfare for poor people” had the “unintended but inevitable outcome of... an unhealthy dependence on the state. State provision has become a trap” (*ibid*). Briefing the media in 2010 on the government’s re-examination of its anti-poverty policies, the Minister for Presidential Affairs and Public Administration, Mokgweetsi Masisi, insisted that the government would avoid handouts that created dependency.⁶²

This was echoed by two social workers quoted in an online media report⁶³ on the ‘National Situational Analysis on Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Botswana’ (2008), conducted by the Ministry of Local Government’s Department of Social Services:

⁶² <http://www.trademarksa.org/news/botswana-seeks-ways-eradicate-poverty>.

⁶³ <http://amandainbotswana.wordpress.com/2011/03/12/government-aid-possible-dependency/>.

‘Culturally as Batswana, we were raised to believe that any person who is an adult is your parent. Then came the modern trends, and government started playing a major role in raising kids by providing all those services: food, shelter and everything, which kind of took responsibility from caregivers to government. People just obliged and were like, “you know what, the government is just doing everything so why should I bother?” and they relax, because before you had to take care of your sister’s child because your sister is family, that’s how it was. But now that the government is playing a part, some caregivers go to the extent of telling kids, “go to the government, that is your parent”.’

According to a second social worker:

‘I think right now the government is spending too much on handouts rather than actually building up the person, which I think makes the situation worse because I don’t see them really standing up or being independent, because government sort of does anything for them. The government doesn’t stand up and say “you know what, let’s educate these people and tell them this is your life, I can help you up to this point but you need to do this as a person”.’

To curb this, he says:

‘I think these are the two main things to do: people need to be taught how to be self-sufficient and not to rely on government. If you give handouts every time the people will just relax because they know that at the end of the day they are getting something, so why should they bother?’.

In short, he believes in “fewer handouts, and more education”.

Social workers may, however, be more likely to echo such sentiments than the poor, or even the general population. It seems likely that an ambivalence about the idle poor is widespread among the professional middle classes in Botswana, and not only among the BDP leadership.⁶⁴

Gulbrandsen (2012) wonders what effect the (generally) paternalistic, modernizing state has had on the subjectivities of its citizens. He concludes that “it seems

⁶⁴ Isaac Chinyoka tells me that this is true even within the Poverty Eradication Unit in the President’s Office.

reasonable to maintain that the state's massive, widespread and persistent intervention in the population has contributed to the fact that the population, in various ways, has been caught up in the process of state formation", most obviously through the schooling system (279; also 313). Drawing on ethnographic research in the 1990s, Helle-Valle (2002) seems to support this view. Having discussed how villagers were incorporated into the 'traditional' structures of headmen and chiefs and were alienated from the 'modern', bureaucratic state, Helle-Valle comments on the nascent welfare state:

'The Botswana state has gained a certain amount of legitimacy in the eyes of its people as a generous patron. Many villagers see "the government", often personified by the President, the local member of parliament or other local representatives of the state, as *motswadintle* – as "he from whom good things come". ... The general attitude is that "the government" or the "BDP" will deliver the goods, so that villagers can live their village lives. It is therefore not surprising that the villagers' attitude to the state apparatus is closely tied to the latter's role as a generous patron. For instance, in 1990, when a number of programmes relating to an eight-year-long drought had just been brought to an end, the general attitude among villagers was that the state's behaviour was *maswe* (bad). Two years later the government (no doubt thanks to the impending election) reintroduced many of these programmes and the general attitude shifted in a more positive direction' (195-6).

Helle-Valle comments in passing on the disdain shown by government employees to villagers, which is consistent with the comments of the social workers quoted above, as well as the views of the civil servants interviewed for the 2002 study of ARAP (see above). Without further evidence on public opinion, it difficult to assess how pervasive are the beliefs articulated by the BDP, or whether they are distinctive in comparison to other parts of Africa.

One reason to doubt whether the BDP ideology is ubiquitous is that the opposition parties' election manifestos routinely promise the expansion of state programmes. This brings us to the question of political competition.

7. Political competition

The shape and size of the welfare state in Botswana reflect the preferences of the BDP, which won more than half of the vote in every election from the pre-independence election of 1965 through to 2009 (see Table 2). The BDP had a comfortable parliamentary majority throughout this period, even when its share of the vote was only just over 50 percent, because of the Westminster-style first-past-the-post constituency system (see Table 2). In 2014, for the first time, it failed to win a majority of the vote but nonetheless retained a majority of seats in parliament. The BDP is arguably the most successful party in Africa in terms of its success in remaining in office for fifty years (and counting).

Botswana has had regular elections since independence, all of which have been strongly contested by opposition parties. In reaction to an uncritical celebration of multi-party democracy in Botswana, a series of scholars in the 1990s and (especially) 2000s pointed to the limits to liberal democracy in Botswana. Nthomang (2007), for example, characterized Botswana as an “enfeebled democracy”. Good (who was later deported for his efforts) labelled it as an ‘authoritarian liberal democratic state’ (1996a), and later with Taylor called it a ‘minimalist democracy’ (Good & Taylor, 2008; see also Good, 2016). These and other scholars drew attention to abuses of power by successive BDP presidents, the BDP’s exploitation of the benefits of incumbency, and the chronic marginalization of San (and perhaps other non-Tswana minorities). Makgala (2006, 2009) analysed the personalized and often regional factionalism that pervaded the political elite within both the BDP and the opposition parties.

Neither the BDP’s long tenure, nor its abuse of its powers, means that it has been immune to electoral pressure. The BDP has always faced vocal criticism from opposition parties. In the mid-1960s it worked hard to construct party structures across the country. Then and later the BDP worked hard to maintain its bedrock of electoral support in rural areas. In the run-up to elections policy-making was clearly shaped by the BDP’s concern to maintain its electoral popularity. The election of 1994, when the BDP’s share of the vote fell dramatically to 53 percent, was a massive shock. The BDP succeeded in stabilising its support at about that level in 1999, 2004 and 2009, but in 2014 it experienced another shock when its share of the vote dropped below 50 percent. The re-election of the BDP has often seemed less than certain. The party’s hold on power has not been secure.

Table 2: Election results, 1984-2014

	1984		1989		1994		1999		2004		2009			2014		
	Votes %	Seats	Votes %	seats	Votes %	seats	Votes %	seats	Votes %	seats	Votes (000)	Votes %	seats	Votes (000)	Votes %	seats
BDP	68	29	65	31	53	27	57	33	52	44	290	53	45	321	47	37
BPP	?	1		0					2	0	8	1	0	*		
BNF	20	4	27	3	38	13	26	6	26	12	120	22	6	*		
UDC														207	30	17
BCP							12	1	17	1	104	19	4	141	20	3
BAM		0		0		0	5	0	3	0	12	2	1			
Indep- endent	0.5	0	?	0	?	0	?	0	<1	0	11	2	1			
Other	?	0	8	0	9	0	?	0	<1	0	8	<1	0	22	3	0
Total	100	34	100	34	100	40	100	40	100	57	545	100	57	690	100	57

Note: seats exclude the 4 seats elected indirectly and the president and attorney-general who were (since 1999 at least) ex officio MPs

* The Umbrella for Democratic Change (UDC) encompassed the BNF, BPP and the Botswana Movement for Democracy. <http://africanelections.tripod.com/bw.htm>

The initial opposition to the BDP was the Botswana People's Party (BPP), which was hostile to chiefs and put forward a 'socialist' programme. Its support was concentrated in the major towns (Lobatse and Francistown). The BPP, however, split prior to the first election (in 1965), and its support declined steadily. It won three seats in both the 1965 and 1969 elections, but in 1969 a rival opposition party – the Botswana National Front (BNF) – also won three seats. By 1984 the BNF had clearly ousted the BPP as the primary opposition party. The BNF brought together in an unlikely coalition the strident socialist Kenneth Koma and the Bangwaketse chief Bathoen II. In 1994 the BNF made a major breakthrough, winning 13 seats (to the BDP's 27, in an enlarged parliament). Soon thereafter (in 1998) the BNF split, with most of its MPs forming a breakaway Botswana Congress Party (BCP). Although the BCP won a significant share of the vote in subsequent elections, it failed to win many seats. In 2014, the BNF combined with other minor opposition parties into the Umbrella for Democratic Change (UDC), but the BCP declined to join (for which it paid a high price when it won only three seats despite winning 20 percent of the vote). The support of both the BNF and BCP was concentrated in urban areas, and opposition parties controlled municipal governments in Gaborone and several other major towns. Opposition support was also based heavily among more economically marginalized urban voters. Whilst both the governing BDP and opposition parties (and trade unions) were rhetorically pro-poor, their rhetoric differed. The BDP espoused a paternalist, conservative doctrine, whilst the opposition presented a more orthodox social democratic discourse.

The BDP has used public expenditure to bolster its electoral support, especially in rural areas. Faced with competition from the new BNF in the 1969 elections, Khama's government secured continued support from the WFP for drought recovery programmes, as we saw above. The Accelerated Rural Development Programme was launched in the run-up to the 1974 elections. In 1979, MPs from the BDP reportedly pressed the government to declare a drought so that drought relief programmes could pour money into their constituencies in the run-up to that year's elections (Munemo, 2012: 132-3). Press reports from the 1979 election campaign indicate that the distribution of food aid was an important campaign issue, one which Khama and his ministers addressed in public meetings across the country (*ibid*: 147). 'Young Turks' in the BDP criticized the party's leaders for neglecting inequality whilst pursuing economic growth (Pickard 1987: 170). The 1984 elections have been described as being "critical in bringing BDP to see the political value of drought relief" (Holm & Cohen, 1988: 36). The Cabinet reportedly over-ruled the Ministry of Finance and expanded massively the drought relief budget (from P12 million in 1983-84 to P40 million in 1984-85) in order to maintain its support in rural areas (*ibid*). In 1994 the opposition BNF criticized the

BDP for “dividing the nation into the haves and the have-nots”, and promised that a BNF government would “create more jobs” and “provide social welfare for the most needy”, including free education, contributory and non-contributory old age pensions, dependents’ and orphans’ benefits, unemployment benefits and pre-school facilities for working parents’ (BNF, 1994: 3-8). Following its narrow victory in the 1994 elections, and looking forward to the next elections in 1999 (Nthomang, 2007: 212), the BDP government moved to introduce old-age pensions and orphans’ benefits, and to assume financial responsibility for feeding programmes, despite the considerable cost of these at a time when the budget was beginning to take strain. Most recently, in the 2009 and 2014 elections, BDP leader and president Ian Khama (the son of Seretse Khama) has sought to brand himself as pro-poor through, inter alia, expanding the *Ipelegeng* workfare programme (Hamer, 2016). The BDP has been willing to appropriate the opposition parties’ policies just as it earlier sought to appropriate Tswana tradition whilst stripping the chiefs of most of their powers. In 1996, when the Minister of Finance announced the introduction of old-age pensions, opposition MPs reacted claimed that the BDP was ‘dancing’ to their ‘tune’.⁶⁵

Scholars who have conducted ethnographic research in rural areas suggest that the BDP’s expansion of state provision (on top of governing during very rapid economic growth) was crucial to it sustaining its electoral support in its rural strongholds. Until the late 1980s, Gulbrandsen assesses, “the ruling party and the government it dominated exercised its hegemony so forcefully ... that it was no simple matter for the opposition to establish a convincing political alternative”:

‘During the first two independence decades it is difficult to see how they could have attacked a government that provided new schools, clinics, water supplies, roads and so on, even in remote rural villages, or one that was quick to implement nationwide feeding programmes as soon as there was a shortage of rain. All the opposition could do – being thus captured within the hegemonic discourse – was to criticize the ruling party for not providing these services fast and widely enough’ (Gulbrandsen, 2012: 249).

The BDP insisted that its leaders – and government officials – participated in popular meetings (*kgotla*), where they were exposed to (controlled) criticisms of the government’s performance with respect to development. Holm & Morgan wrote

⁶⁵ MPs Dabutha (BNF, Gaborone North) and J.M. Pilane (BNF, Kgatleng West), *Hansard*, 14th and 20th February 1996, pp 53-4 and 72-3.

in 1985 that the BDP had come to view drought relief as “a very effective means of reinforcing its rural support”:

‘What the civil servants once had urged on the politicians with great difficulty, the latter have now come to perceive as an important means to obtain re-election... The character of the action to be taken every year is personally announced by the President in a special speech to the nation. M.P.s attend meetings of their respective district drought committees, and civil servants involved in particular schemes at the local level make regular reports to the district councils, thus allowing their members to take credit with their constituents. Indeed, many councillors are active in the administration of the various relief programmes in their ward’ (1985: 476).

Four years later, Molutsi reported that a survey showed that

‘the single most important reason given by respondents ... for being a member of the BDP was the Drought Relief Programme. Through this project, where many people are fed, subsidized, employed and assisted in so many ways, the ruling party has successfully resisted political inroads into its popularity, especially in the rural areas’ (1989: 128).

Other factors were also important in the BDP’s diminishing support – most obviously, its reputation was badly tarnished by allegations of corruption as well as internal factional conflict, giving the party “the look of a party given over to greed and infighting” (Good & Taylor, 2006: 55) – but spending programmes seem to have been crucial to sustaining its support.

The opposition parties exerted less pressure on the BDP than they might have done. The BNF failed in the 1990s “to develop clear, effective programmes and policy strategies” that responded to voters’ concerns, perhaps because it tried to provide “a political home for every elite group with a grievance, whether cultural, related to power politics, or specifically relating to structural problems of socio-economic inequality” and therefore remained deeply fractious (Selolwane, 2002: 83; see also Osei-Hwedie, 2001, Makgala, 2006; but see the contrasting analysis in Tsie, 1996: 608). They continued to present themselves as more pro-poor than the BDP. In its 2009 election manifesto, for example, the BCP/BAM together put forward what they called a “people-centered social agenda” that would expand public provision, including a “national nutrition policy that ensures that all families in rural and urban areas get adequate and quality meals”, reducing the age of entitlement for

old-age pensions from 65 to 60 years, raising the value of the old age pension to P750 per month (“to align it with the cost of living”). In 2014, the Umbrella for Democratic Change campaigned around the idea that no one should be ‘left out’. It criticized the government for doing too little through social protection, including through the *Ipelegeng* workfare movement. A UDC government would increase the value of the pension from P250 to P450 per month (UDC, 2014). In the 2000s, both the BPC and UDC presented themselves as social democratic. Their efficacy, however, was undermined by their inability to unite.

Electoral competition helps to explain both the expansion of public provision and its pronounced rural bias. Munemo (2012) argues, perversely, that the BDP implemented cash-for-work programmes rather than food aid in the 1980s because of its strength, as the incumbent party, *not* because of its electoral vulnerability. His overarching hypothesis, applied to several countries, is that electorally vulnerable government prefer food aid which politicians can manipulate to consolidate their support, whilst more secure parties are happy to shift from discretionary expenditures to programmes administered by bureaucrats. Contra Munemo’s hypothesis, Botswana was a case of a governing party introducing more and more programmatic reforms as its share of the vote declined.

8. Conclusion

Esping-Andersen attributed the conservative welfare regimes of continental Europe to the absence of a ‘red-green’ political coalition between the industrial and urban working class with small, capital-intensive, family farmers. In Germany, most obviously, labour-intensive agriculture predominated in the early twentieth century, and farmers were recruited into a conservative coalition that sought to repress trade unions and left-wing parties whilst co-opting some workers (especially civil servants) into corporatist institutions. After the Second World War, the German middle classes supported conservative reforms because they wished to preserve occupationally-segregated social insurance programmes (and ensuing status differentials) and remained loyal to the Christian Democrats. Underlying this politics was a history of absolutism (rather than liberal democracy) and Catholicism (with its commitment to preserving the traditional family) (Esping-Andersen, 1990: 26-33, 133-5). The Christian democratic understanding of social citizenship emphasized ‘duties rather than rights, the family and the social group rather than the individual, society rather than the state, and distributional justice rather than

social justice' (Van Kersbergen, 1995: 178), with distributional justice understood in terms of classes or status groups receiving their fair but unequal shares.

The conservative welfare regime in Botswana had some features in common with the conservative regimes of continental Europe: The state sought to co-opt public sector workers, in part through social security (spending 1.2 percent of GDP on this, compared to 1.7 percent on all safety nets); and the BDP and state were strongly committed to both the status hierarchy and the family. But the welfare regime was far less statist than in countries such as Germany, leaving protection against risks to the market as well as kin. Botswana's welfare state was more residual than the conservative one in Europe, providing means-tested benefits for the poor (including through workfare), whilst universal programmes (such as the old-age pensions and school feeding programmes) provided modest benefits. Social insurance remained very limited.⁶⁶ Moreover, Botswana's welfare state was hardly corporatist. In these respects, the welfare regime in Botswana was more akin to a conservative, familialist version of the liberal variant of welfare regimes that Esping-Andersen identified in Europe. The BDP adhered to a conservative ideology, but not one with roots in Catholicism. It was an ideology of modernization, but one concerned more with the challenges of de-agrarianisation rather than those of urbanization and industrialisation.

Comparing Botswana with Mauritius, Ulriksen (2011, 2012) concluded that Botswana was a laggard with respect to welfare state-building generally and in terms of its specific ('neo-liberal') responses to the global crisis in 2008-09. Ulriksen attributes this to the weakness of lower middle classes in Botswana relative to Mauritius, which in turn reflected underlying economic differences, with Botswana's cattle- and later diamond-based economy empowering elites relative to lower classes. Ulriksen is surely correct to contrast the welfare state constructed under *conservative* BDP governments in Botswana with that built under the *social democratic* (or more radical) governments in Mauritius. But she misrepresents both the differences between these two cases and the reasons for these differences.

Both Mauritius and Botswana built welfare states based on social assistance programmes, but they did so via very different routes. Mauritius was a heavily proletarianised economy and society from the nineteenth century. The economy

⁶⁶ Botswana provided pensions for white-collar public sector employees. These were privatized in 2001, requiring massive capital transfers during 2002-03. There is no mandatory social insurance (although this was debated in parliament in 2008), and manual workers in the public sector are not covered by the public sector scheme. Most workers rely on gratuities or severance payments (including through provident funds) – see Selolwane (2012): 112-5, 120-2.

remained predominantly agricultural through the mid-twentieth century, but it was dominated by sugar plantations, not smallholder or peasant production. Poverty was widespread, and could not be addressed through the expansion of peasant production because there was no surplus land. Contributory social assistance was ruled out because sugar was sold in very competitive international markets. Social democratic governments therefore countered poverty – especially in old age – through generous social assistance programmes (Seekings, 2011). In Botswana, in contrast, the population was, for most of the twentieth century, incompletely proletarianised. It comprised a ‘peasantariat’ or semi-proletarianised peasantry (Parson, 1984). Conservative policy-makers sought to mitigate poverty through sustaining an agrarian society based on peasant production and the extended family spanning both small, family farms and the wage labour market. Social assistance programmes were introduced, in the first instance, to tide peasants through periods of drought, and later to protect those specific groups (the elderly, orphans, destitutes) who fell through the cracks of agrarian society.

Ulriksen underestimates the extent of the welfare state in Botswana, by neglecting drought relief and peasant-support programmes. Under the BDP, a welfare state was built, but it was a conservative one. Ulriksen also exaggerates the reach of ‘neo-liberalism’ in Botswana in the 2000s. The government did reintroduce school fees, but then exempted the poor. Proposals to introduce new means-tests (for old-age pensions, for example) were not adopted or implemented. Welfare programmes did not expand, nor were they rolled back. The welfare state in Botswana remained conservative, not neo-liberal.

Costing close to 2 percent of GDP, Botswana’s social assistance programmes may be less expensive than those in Mauritius, but they are more extensive than their counterparts in most countries in East and Southern Africa. The Botswana welfare state was far more substantial than its counterparts in neighbouring Zambia or Zimbabwe. In the 1990s, this reflected in part rapid economic growth, which generated resources far beyond those available to the Zambian or Zimbabwean states. Even in the 1980s, however, Botswana has an impressive set of public policies to relieve poverty. The brutality of the environment was an important factor, in that the government of Botswana was compelled earlier to develop policies for the relief of and recovery from drought. Political factors were important also. The political elite was conservative, but its distaste for the poor (widespread across Southern Africa) was tempered by a rhetoric of responsibility that was rooted in the circumstances of drought and the seizure of chiefly powers in the late 1960s. The governing party faced real electoral competition from opposition parties, and implemented policies that mitigated poverty in its electoral strongholds

in rural areas. The governing party also enjoyed a broadly Weberian bureaucracy, facilitating a programmatic response to poverty rather than the deployment of discretionary patronage.

Appendix 1: WFP programmes in Botswana, 1980-1997

No.	Programme (and type)	Approved	Cost to WFP [<i>food only</i>]	Duration
2440	Emergency Strategic Grain Reserve	Aug 1979	\$1.7m [\$0.7m]	5 years
324 EXP II	Feeding programme: primary schools and vulnerable groups	May 1979; two-year extension approved Oct 1982	\$42m [\$24m]	323 was originally initiated in 1966; EXP II was for 3 years (1980-82), later extended to five years (covering 1983 and 1984) in three steps (+12, +3, +9 months)
1291	Emergency Operation	July 1982	\$212k (+ \$1.6m from IEFR)	3 months
324 EXP III	Feeding programme: primary schools and vulnerable groups	June 1984 (with budget increases in June 1984, Jan 1986 and June 1986)	\$14m [\$9m] \$34m [\$29m] \$38m [\$22m] \$44m [\$25m]	3 years: 1985-87 (plus 3 months)
2478Q	Assistance for Zimbabwean refugees		\$3.5m	
1394	Emergency Operation: Drought	July 1984	\$0.5m (IEFR)	6 months: first half of 1985
1394 EXP	Emergency Operation: Drought	April 1985	\$0.5m [\$0.35m]	6 months: second half of 1985
1450	Emergency Operation:	Nov 1985	\$0.4m [\$0.35m]	first half of 1986; distribution completed

	Drought (followed on 1394 EXP)			Oct 1986
3343	Emergency Operation: Refugees	May 1987	\$0.35m [\$0.3m]	1 year
324 EXP IV	Feeding programme: primary schools and vulnerable groups	April 1988	\$22m [\$16m]	3 years: April 1988 – April 1991; extended to a 4 th year and an additional 9 months
3472	Emergency Operation: Drought	Nov 1987		6 months: first half of 1988
5060	Emergency Operation: Drought	June 1992	\$3.5m [\$2.5m]	6 months
324 EXP V	Feeding programme: primary schools and vulnerable groups	May 1992	\$22m [\$14m]	5 years: 1993-97

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